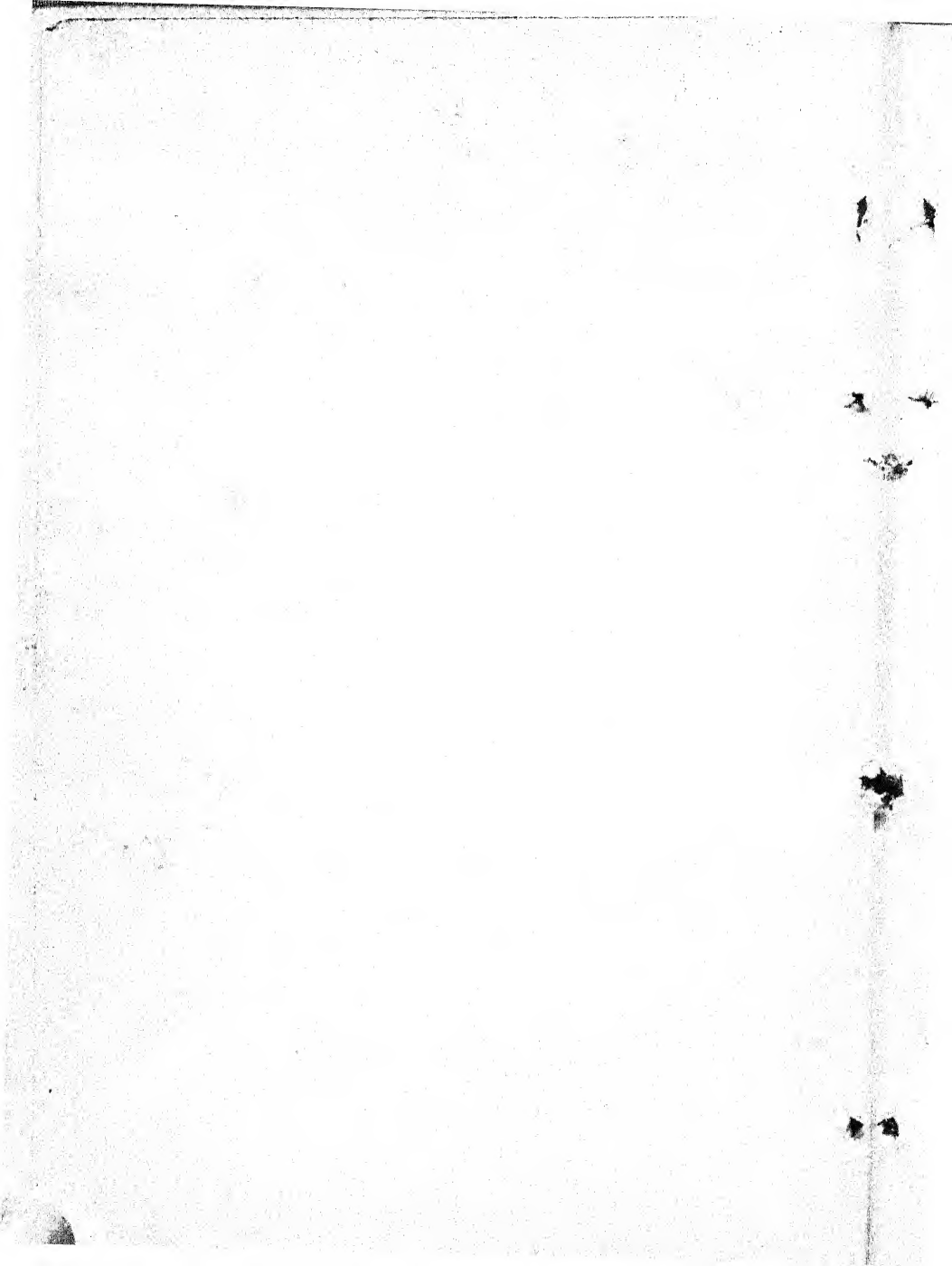


TALL MEN

"And some shall be even as I, beloved
of the gods in their way." They shall
not be heroes, but the next best thing.

They will have walked with
tall men, comradewise."



TALL MEN

JAMES STUART MONTGOMERY



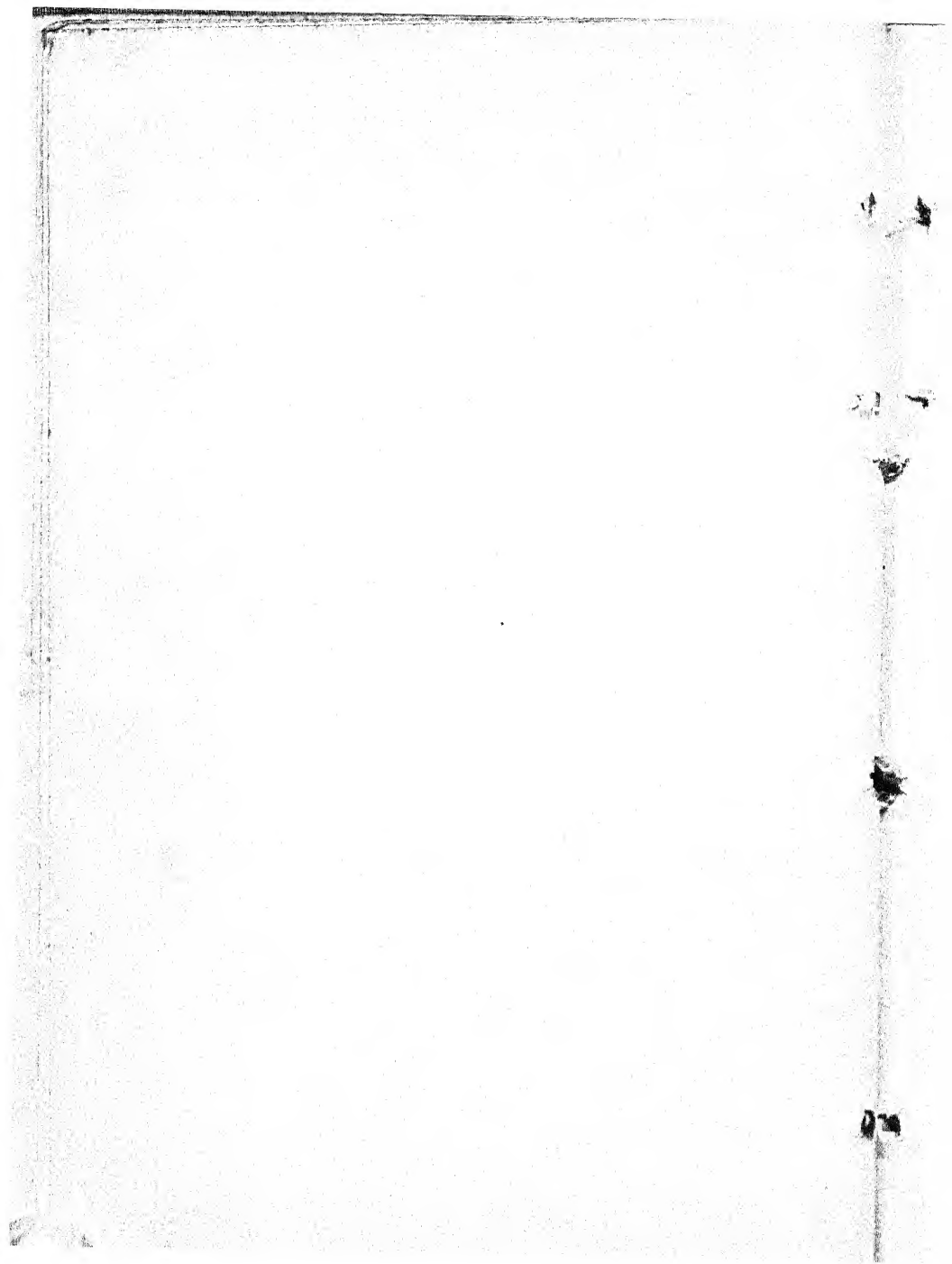
THE LITERARY GUILD
NEW YORK OF AMERICA MCMXXVII

Copyright, 1927, by
JAMES STUART MONTGOMERY

Printed in U.S.A.

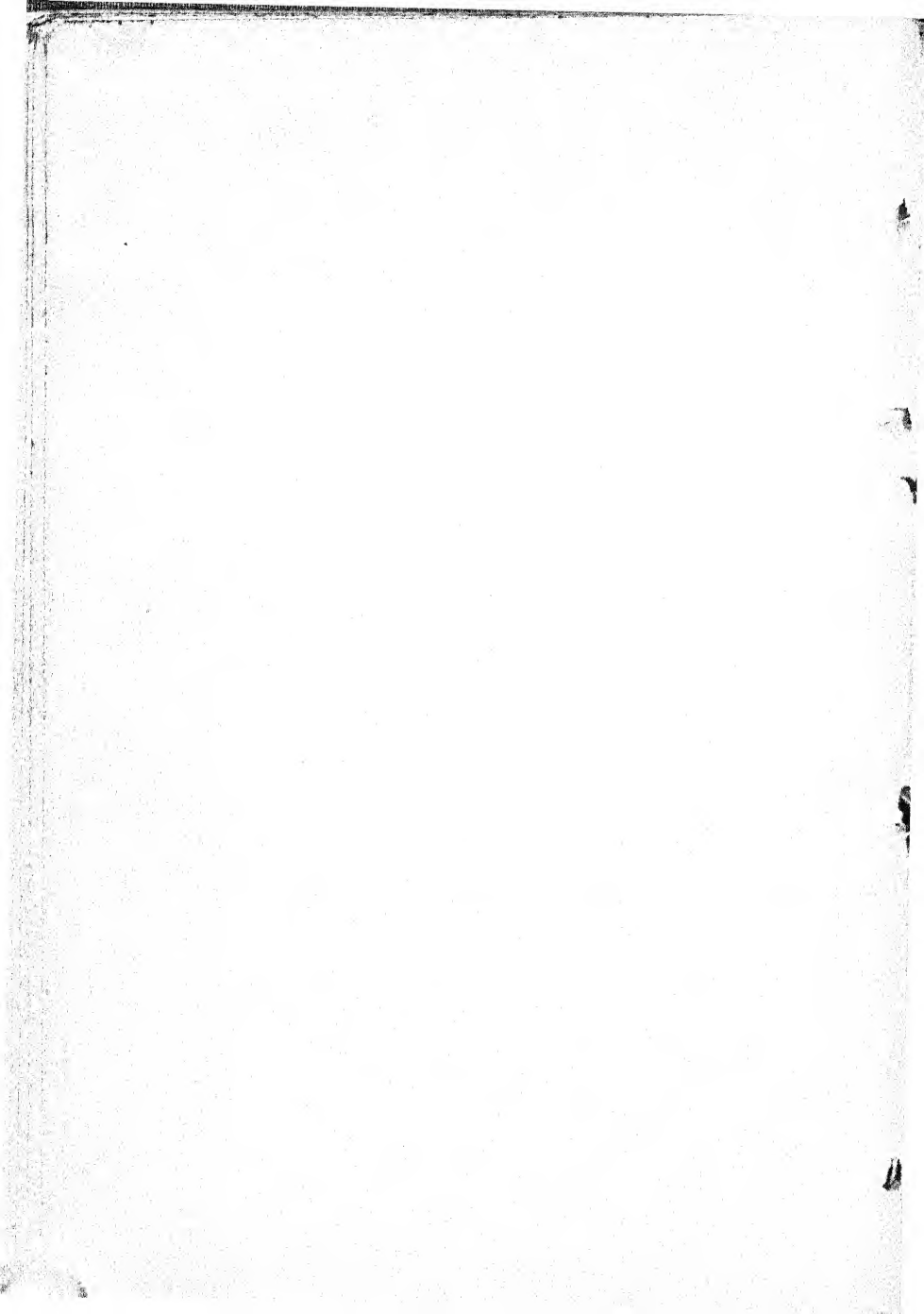
Manufactured by
AMERICAN BOOKBINDERY—STRAFORD PRESS, INC.

TO
L. M. S.
and
M. S. B.



Contents

| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---------|--|------|
| I | I COMMENCE MY OBITUARY | 1 |
| II | THE HIGH BARBAREE | 11 |
| III | OUTWARD BOUND | 29 |
| IV | JONAH | 43 |
| V | ONE GODDESS-LIKE AMONG WOMEN | 61 |
| VI | THE FATE OF NATIONS | 71 |
| VII | I SEE A SHADOW | 87 |
| VIII | THE GREAT GIROND | 99 |
| IX | BEWARE THE IDES OF MARCH | 120 |
| X | IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD | 134 |
| XI | WE HOOD THE BINNACLE | 142 |
| XII | I FILL MY PIPE | 153 |
| XIII | WE RUN THE GAUNTLET | 166 |
| XIV | OLD DIXIE'S BOTTOM DOLLARS. | 183 |
| XV | I FEEL THE NEED OF BRANDY | 192 |
| XVI | OFF AGAIN | 201 |
| XVII | THE KNIFE IS FLESHED | 211 |
| XVIII | WE COMMIT ONE TO THE DEEP | 228 |
| XIX | THE CAPTAIN SPOOPS TO FOLLY | 249 |
| XX | WHAT A WOMAN! | 256 |
| XXI | RAPHAEL SEMMES | 273 |
| XXII | REVELRY BY NIGHT | 284 |
| XXIII | THE BATTLE OFF CHERBOURG | 295 |
| XXIV | TALL MEN | 312 |
| | POSTSCRIPT | 319 |



TALL MEN



Chapter I

I COMMENCE MY OBITUARY

*The Stragglers' Club,
Pall Mall, June 30, 1914.*

THE thought must have been dodging about the hinterland of my subconsciousness for years. But this morning for the first time I formulated it in words. And of all places to indulge in philosophical speculation and arrive at a definite conclusion as to the meanings of things and all that—I must needs choose the corner where Cockspur Street pokes its nose recklessly into the busy traffic of Trafalgar Square.

I was standing balancing on the curb idly debating whether there was any good and valid cause why I should risk my life among the wheels and hoofs that milled about Nelson's Column. There was as little reason for my gaining the opposite side of the square as for remaining where I was—or continuing in the direction of the river. To what profit then should I court a picturesque end beneath the tires of some motor maniac, merely to furnish an item for the penny press?

Then the thought came.

"What does it matter? You have already been dead these fifty years."

My mind accepted the thing tamely. There was no attempt at argument. It was as self-evident and unanswerable as a proposition in Euclid.

Half a century ago your spirit "entered into rest," as they say on the moss-grown gravestones in country churchyards. Therefore you are as dead as Hector or any other of those old Johnnies. Q. E. D.

I withdrew the exploratory foot that had ventured over the curb and set about tracing back the line of reasoning which had led to this conclusion. It wasn't doubt but rather curiosity that impelled me to ask myself what subconscious impressions had contributed to the projection of such a thought. My speculations were productive of no very satisfactory results. Even now some hours later the only explanation I can offer is that the thought, born full grown, was the outcome of the combined influences of the spot where I was standing and the impression that poor old Johnstone's death had made upon me.

Yes, it is fifty years to the day almost that the *Deerhound* dropped anchor in Southampton Water. Half a century since I "entered into rest." The existence I have led since has not been unpleasant. Neither is the existence led by departed spirits, in all probability. But it has been too passive and orderly an existence to be dignified by the name of "life."

And so I stood on the corner of Cockspur Street, to all appearances a harmless old codger enjoying a morning stroll, but in reality a disembodied spirit yearning over its memories. As I stood there it struck me that

I was standing at a kind of hub of the universe—the mathematical dead center of the known world. From Trafalgar Square you can take a bus east into the City or west along Piccadilly—north to Hampstead Heath or south to Hammersmith. Not a Sabbath day's journey away lies Greenwich, where the sun stops at noon to set his chronometer. Or if you would go further afield there are the smiling young clerks in the shipping offices of Cockspur Street who will book you to Brighton or Borneo or the Ultima Thule with equal pleasure.

"Ultima Thule? Oh yes, sir. Steamer sailing Saturday from Liverpool. Here's quite a nice outside cabin. Forty guineas. Quite good in Ultima Thule this time of year. Thank you, sir. Hope you have a pleasant journey."

Yes, from Cockspur Street you can set out for anywhere—except one where. And that is back. I am not one to hymn the praises of Youth and wail its passing as a woman mourns the passing of her beauty. Every age has its pleasures, its penalties and its compensations. And every man (I hope) has his great moment, his golden day, his high year, when the earth and its fullness are his—as never they were before, or will be again. To some these things come early, to some late. Perhaps to many men not at all. As it happens, my high year came in youth. That it was so brief and passed so completely was my fate or fault. How shall I say, or any man, whether these two be not the same thing?

But, thank heaven, for all my youth I knew my for-

tune for what it was, while the taste of it was strong in my mouth. I even believe that when the *Deerhound* dropped her anchor with a splash at Southampton I felt my heart go with it.

I remember thinking: "There's the end of that chapter, and you'll be lucky if you ever read another like it." Or do I merely know that I *should* have thought it? I don't know and it doesn't matter. I do know one thing, however. I never did read another chapter like it.

Yes, it must have been the combination of Cockspur Street and poor old Johnstone that brought me to the realization of the footling existence I have led these many years. Footling is the word. A padded existence. Like a fat grub, gorged on mulberry leaves, and asleep in his cocoon. Except that the grub will some day emerge as a moth and have a rare time flitting about. Or else his bed clothes will be unwound from around him and twisted into a thread of silk. And in that case he will have justified his existence. But I—

Well, it is too late in the day to rail at fate or fault or folly, now.

I did not cross Trafalgar Square after all, but drew back my adventurous foot and returned to the club which I had quitted only a few minutes before. In the brief moment while I stood weighing my chances of reaching the opposite pavement alive, I resolved on a venture far more hazardous than any defiance of the petrol-breathing monsters that barred my path.

I had decided to write a book!

At the Club this morning between the second soft-boiled egg and the first spoonful of marmalade I ran across this item under "Deaths" in *The Times*:

JOHNSTONE: June 29 to 15 B—— Square, Arthur Travers Johnstone, beloved husband of Alicia Johnstone, son of the late Martin Hope Johnstone, Chairman of the Board of the Eastern Railways, Senior Warden St. James-in-the-Fields.

Good God! What a send-off!

A human being with a soul of sorts, perhaps. Certainly with blood in his veins. And hopes and fears and experiences. Dismissed—written off the books like a bad debt with a half-dozen lines of type too small to read with ease.

The desire for immortality is strong within every one of us. The desire that the precious warm intimate thing we call personality shall not perish utterly like a candle flame snuffed out by a puff of wind. And here was old Johnstone gone, and with him were gone his secrets and his prides, his sorrows and regrets—all the treasures, good and bad, he had gathered along the way. Of course he may have taken that personality with him to the other side. But we have no way of telling. All that I, or the world in general, will know of him is compressed in five lines of type. And even those lines will fall prey to the power of the dustman tomorrow morning.

A human soul is a lonely thing, when you come to think of it, wrapped in impenetrable reticences. I have

known Johnstone about the Club for a quarter of a century. I know the brand of whiskey he preferred. It was Dewar's. We have taken a peg together often enough, goodness knows I know a bit about his political opinions and his taste in books. And he was rather keen on horses. We were friends in a tolerant, off-hand way. But about the real Johnstone I know as little as I do about Thomas, the blue-coated commissioner at the door, who bears such a striking resemblance to Lord Kitchener. In fact I know considerably more about Thomas. He wears his simple and honorable record on his breast for all the world to see. There is the South African medal and one or two more. One can infer at least that Thomas enlisted in Her Majesty's forces at such and such a date. That he burnt powder in this and that campaign and was honorably discharged at some date prior to his appointment as commissioner at the Club.

If I had the cheek I might even pump Thomas discreetly as to the thoughts and feelings of a fine upstanding young Thomas Atkins of some years ago. Perhaps I will some day.

But I can't go to some fellow here in the Club and say:

"See here. You knew Johnstone better than I did. What sort of chap was he underneath his pleasant exterior? For instance did he ever love a woman before he became the beloved husband of Alicia? And which of them broke the other's heart? Did he ever sail before the mast or gamble away a fortune or go pros-

pecting for gold? And what more or less discreditable episode of his past meant a thousand times more to him than being chairman of the board or senior warden?

"Don't tell me that a man can live to Johnstone's age and never have done anything more than they try to pretend in that silly obituary."

In the first place if I did have the colossal impudence to put those questions, the fellow wouldn't know. In the second place, he wouldn't tell me if he did. In the third place, he would be perfectly justified in telling me to go to the devil.

Strange! I never had the least curiosity about Johnstone while he was alive. I took him for granted. But if his shade were to enter the writing-room now, I would put it plump up to him.

"Look here, old man. I can't see you dead and buried and forgotten in half-a-dozen lines. It isn't fair. You don't want to be remembered as the chairman of the board or the senior warden or any such bloodless creature as that. If you could turn the clock back, what o'clock would it be and what would be going on? What particular memory is the immediate jewel of your soul that you like to take out and play with when no one's about—would like to show off and boast of, if your damned British diffidence would let you? Let's have it, and I will write you an obituary that may make the rector of St. James-in-the-Fields wonder a bit about his late senior warden. But it will make your poor old ghost chuckle."

All this by way of apology. And it is the last I

expect to make. I am going to do for myself what I can't do for Johnstone. I am going to write my own obituary and do just as well by myself as I know how. My story will break off short in the year '64. If I have done anything since that time worth recording, I have forgotten it. The life I have led has been well enough in its way, but it has been the kind that gives you a waist measure and fatty degeneration of the soul. Forty years and more of digging among the dry bones of dusty old laws. A generation of red tape and fools-cap—very appropriately named, that. Half a lifetime of being smothered under a fusty wig and a black mother hubbard, listening to bad Latin and smiling at worse jokes perpetrated by pompous old dodos sitting on woolsacks.

But, thanked be the gods, I don't believe I ever took it quite seriously. Even as a fledgling barrister, the very baby of the bar, I wore my tongue in my cheek. Perhaps I was born too old ever to throw myself wholeheartedly into the games men play with the gravity of children. Or it may be that I am an incurable romantic—which is another way of saying that I have never grown up at all.

However that may be I hold and do affirm it: For whatever purpose we were put into this world it was not to play the rôle of humorless comedians in a solemn farce, which richly deserves to be hissed off the stage by the celestial audience. What we were given eyes and brains and hands and immortal souls for, I don't know. But it was not for the purpose of suing and

being sued in law courts. Nor for being immured in dark offices and reckoning up our own and our fellows' worth in terms of pounds, shillings and pence. Pounds, shillings and pence, mark you, which do not actually exist even in their own miserable reality but only as ink marks in ledgers.

Why did I not years ago break away from the stupid game of follow-my-leader that revolves endlessly and aimlessly about the law courts, and in and out of Threadneedle Street, and clamors about the Exchange? Why does any square peg remain in a round hole? I have always admired Henley's lines about being master of your fate and captain of your soul. It is no end of an ideal. But I wonder how much any of us, even the strongest, have to say about what happened to us.

The small portion of my life I am about to waste ink on, was the result of the veriest chance. And even then I did not do anything very startling. I was always better at looking on while the other chap bowled over the wickets. But it *is* something to see the wickets go down with a smash! The next best thing to being a hero is to have rubbed shoulders and clinked glasses and smoked pipes with the stout fellows. And to have seen them do the things that most people have only read about. I would rather have been the smallest and shakiest drummer boy at Waterloo than to have been a Rothschild three times over. I would rather have been at Balaclava and cheered the Six Hundred than to be able to write my cheque for six figures.

And feeling as I do about it, I would hate people to

think, when I am gone, that I had never been anything but a tiresome old turkey cock who rather fancied himself on account of some little tuppence ha'p'ny successes at the bar.

It is pure vanity if you like. Of course it is vanity. But I want people to know that I was not born an old foggy with a paunch like an alderman's. In my time I have voyaged the seas of romance with the winds of adventure in my sails. I have crept by night into forbidden harbors under the mouths of hungry guns. I have stood on decks quivering to the beat of over-driven engines, while shells whimpered through the rigging or slapped spray into my face.

I have served on a bloody gun deck and had a good ship sunk under my feet. And tall men I have known! From Semmes and Merrihew, that courtly adventurer, down to little Girond. Yes, he, too, was a tall man for all his scant inches. For he went at the last like a seaman. And there was a woman, fit mate for the tallest of them.

If I can only make you know them a little, as I knew them well! It will be a hard task, but worth the trying. They will supply the excuse, if I need one, for writing my own obituary. I shall preserve myself, like a fly, in the amber of the lives of better men. And if the fly be nothing much to look at—still, amber has beauty and a value of its own.

Chapter II

THE HIGH BARBAREE

OFTEN enough you hear of a man's fate hingeing upon the toss of a coin. In my case it was literally true. Had Worthington's guinea fallen "tails," I would have been in for nothing more than an inclement wait beneath the sputtering gas light over some stage door—and perhaps a headache in the morning. As it was, I was to see many things before my eyes next beheld the lights of London.

Possibly you remember the Fox and Grapes hard by Covent Garden. Or if you don't your father or your grandfather does—if the old gentleman, as I greatly suspect, was a bit of a dog in the days when Prince Bertie set the pace and London was half-a-hundred years younger. Well, there were Worthington and I, snugged down in a stall in the bar of the Fox and Grapes as cozy and comfortable as you please, with a good dinner lining our ribs and the world before us.

"What's the ticket now?" asked Worthington, stretching his long legs and complacently regarding the resplendent checkerboard pattern of his trousers.

"I'm in your hands," I replied, "but if you ask me,

why not make an evening of it here? A man could do worse than take his ease at his inn on a night like this." And so he could have. Without was the wind, which after playing hide and seek through the porticoes of Covent Garden would come shrilling and whistling like a battalion of street boys to rattle at the door and fling pebbles of rain against the window panes. Within was the warmth of blazing coals and an unlimited supply of Perkins' Entire, not to mention spiritual consolation of greater potency.

But Worthington was of another mind.

"Not to be thought of. You will come to no good end, my fine fellow, wasting the evenings of your youth in sloth and idleness. What says the poet?

Let us then be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate,
Petticoats to be pursuing
Or——

I forget the other line. But no matter. The moral is obvious."

Thus reproved, I besought Worthington to call the game and promised to follow whither he led.

"There are two courses open to us, as gentlemen and scholars and earnest youths bent on improving our minds," said Worthington. "Let us examine them prayerfully. Wouldst throw a sop to Cerberus at the gate and seek the uncertain favors of the fair, or beard the tarry pirate on his poop and hold high wassail with the corsair's crew?"

"In other words we go and stand in the rain outside of some stage door or go down to the river and chin with this mysterious mariner you've told me about? In either case we leave a good fire and go out into the wet."

"Much learning has not made thee mad, O most noble Festus. In fact I doubt if learning has had any effect on your mind at all." Worthington grinned. "On the whole you have summed up the situation both excellently and well."

"So be it," I agreed. "Lead on and I will follow."

"No, let the choice be on the knees of the gods rather than on my overburdened conscience," said Worthington, producing a gold-piece. "Heads for the corsair and tails the green-room."

Heads it was.

Worthington summoned the waiter. "Brandy and soda for us both, George. And on second thought, never mind the soda." As the drink of heroes was set before us Worthington raised his glass. "A little wine for thy stomach's sake and a bit of brandy for the good of thy soul. The first is St. Paul's sentiment and the second is mine. But they are both equally sound doctrine."

Worthington, be it known, was at this time gracing the halls of Balliol and intending for the Church. But the only effect of his excursions into theology noticeable so far was a tendency to lard his speech with scriptural quotations more relevant than reverent. His anticipated adoption of the cloth seemed to add zest

to a natural taste for waistcoats of exuberant pattern and trousers of unrestrained plaids. All the more startling, then, was the contrast when you saw above this gorgeous raiment a guileless countenance and near-sighted eyes looking mildly out through steel-rimmed spectacles. The face was that of a sheep of less than ordinary sophistication—or, say, a newly hatched curate. The body was that of a Christy minstrel.

As we rattled over the cobbles in a hackney coach I pressed my friend for further details concerning his “mysterious mariner.”

“In the first place he’s a sort of distant cousin of mine,” Worthington explained; “but for all that he’s not a bit set up over it.”

“He wouldn’t be,” I murmured.

“No?” asked Worthington. “But you must admit it shows a very proper spirit not to go bragging all over the shop about one’s family connections. But then, he’s rather a tremendous fellow on his own. Naval man. Did something quite special in the Crimea. Spiked the Russian guns or singed the Czar’s beard—or what not. Got the V. C. for it, whatever it was.”

“Very good and infernally lucid,” I retorted. “The only thing I don’t know about our man now is his name.”

“Oh that,” replied Worthington. “Name’s Merrihew.”

“And what’s all this rubbish about his being a pirate?”

I found myself addressing Worthington's back. He had thrust his head and shoulders through the coach window and I heard his voice addressing some person or persons unknown. "Now then, young skitamaroo, let's see you pull an uglier one than that."

A shrill cheer arose from the vicinity of our rear springs.

"Cripes, guv'nor. If I 'ad a fice like that I'd let it out to Madam Tussaud for 'er Chamber of 'Orrors."

Worthington drew in his head. "There's a young Chesterfield out for an airing on our springs who thought he could down me in a mug-making contest. But this one floored him." He contorted his features into a grimace of fearful and wonderful hideousness. "I learned that from a gargoyle on Notre Dame Cathedral. Third floor front lodge he is, counting three from the east end. Look him up next time you're there. He has been a source of pure inspiration to me. But what were you saying about the corsair?"

I repeated my questions.

"Oh, I'm afraid he isn't really going in for piracy on the high seas. But he's up to something shady. We'll pump him a bit and see what his game is. And he's sure to have a prime bottle or two tucked away somewhere. I can promise you an interesting and instructive evening."

The clocks were striking ten as we drew up under a flickering gas lamp which waged a hopeless battle against the darkness of a narrow street in the neighborhood of London Bridge. The rain had ceased but

the clammy breath of the river penetrated to the bone and set me thinking longingly of the cozy delights of the Fox and Grapes. But as I stood there shivering and miserable there fell on my ear a sound. And in the hearing of it I knew the meaning of pure beauty. That is, if pure beauty is what I think it is. This I know. The sound took me by the heart and shook me. It sent an electric current tingling up my spine, stirring the short hairs on my neck and bringing the moisture to my eyes. For the first time I had heard the sharp quick stroke of a ship's bell, followed by the hoarse hail of the anchor watch: "Four bells and a thick night."

Worthington and the hackney coach, London, the world and myself had ceased to exist. There was nothing but a river of black, polished marble on which someone had carelessly spilled some splashes of molten gold. Nothing but that and a sense of exaltation shot through and through with a feeling of envy unspeakable. Somewhere out on that dark river was the seaman whose hail had stirred me as a *gloria in excelsis*, chanted from a dim chancel, might exalt the kneeling devotee. And it was he I envied with all my heart and soul.

I was not altogether a fool. I knew he was but a common foremast jack, whose day was a monotonous round of holystoning and "watch and watch," with a forecastle bunk at the end. His fare was salt pork and ship's biscuit with plum duff as an occasional treat. A short-lived debauch on shore was his only

contact with the esthetics. Yet from the soles of my neatly varnished boots I envied him. He was part of his ship. He would be part of her when the first beat of her paddles stirred her bulk and urged her nose into the current. He would watch the docks and warehouses, the domes and spires of the city go sliding by. Yes, and he would be part of her when she felt the first lift of the open sea.

Worthington touched me on the arm. From somewhere in that deserted street of blackly towering warehouses he had unearthed a water-man.

"Know the *Venture*?" Worthington asked. "She ought to be about here somewhere."

"Aye, gov'nor, she's over yonder."

As we pulled out into the river I strained my eyes to make out the ship we were approaching, but except for a few lights apparently suspended in mid air, I could see nothing. Then suddenly as though a curtain of mist had lifted she materialized—a gray phantom ship lying low to the water. She had much the appearance of a modern steam yacht. There was the same sharp bow, narrow beam and backward rake to her sparless masts that seemed to promise speed, and amidships rose a rounded hump of paddle box with two tall stacks one abaft the other.

"Aboard the *Venture*," our boatman called, backing on his oars. A voice answered and a dark head appeared over the bulwarks.

"Is Captain Merrihew aboard?" Worthington asked.

"Captain Merry you'll be meaning," the head replied. "Aye, he's aboard."

"And alias, by gad. It's worse than I had hoped for." Worthington confided in a whisper. "If he hasn't a Jolly Roger stored away in his locker I'll eat my hat." And the graceless wretch wriggled with delight.

As we clambered up the gangway, the head, without moving from its place at the rail, sang out:

"Hi, John Franswor, look alive."

"Allo." Another head, a smaller one mounted on a shorter body, joined the first.

"Visitors for the cap'n, me hearty," replied the first head. Then in a rumbling aside which was perfectly audible, "That'll mean a splicin' of the main brace in the cabin, and a bottle or so with maybe a drop or two stuck to the bottom—and me perishin' with the cold and growing web-footed from trampin' a wet deck."

"Rest tranquil, my old. Be very sure I shall not forget."

"Little-head," as I thought of him, detached himself from the rail in time to meet us at the head of the gangway. An agile little man, in a white jacket, with a pompadour of uncompromising rectitude and mustachioed like a tom cat. His bow would not have been out of place in a minuet and his voice was velvet.

"My gentlemen, you desire Monsieur le Capitaine? Accompany me if it pleases you."

He led the way across the deck and through a saloon

fitted up as a dining-room with a red-clothed table and revolving chairs, and rapped softly at a door.

"Some gentlemen to make you the visit, mon capitaine."

"Very good, Girond, show them in."

Our guide threw open the door. A man seated in a high-backed chair at a heavy and richly carved table of some dark wood rose as we entered.

"As I live, it's Mad Worthington," he exclaimed in a tone of evident pleasure. As he and Worthington pumped arms and pounded shoulders I had an opportunity of observing the man who had done things in the Crimea. Well over the six foot mark he stood, with the down-tapering figure of the athlete, which his loosely fitting semi-naval uniform could not conceal. Sun and wind had toned a naturally fair complexion to a shade a little darker than his crisp golden beard, cropped close and to a point. The nose of a Roman pro-consul gave a decided impression of strength to his countenance. And the smile, which wrinkled the corners of his rather deep-set eyes, was of that genuine quality seen only on the lips of men who have not lost the gift of laughter.

Introductions over, the viking resumed his seat and waved us into chairs.

"And now, Arthur, my lad," began Worthington, "what's all about it? There's something devilish mysterious afoot and I'll not rest in my bed until I get the straight of it. We come aboard a peaceful merchantman to find her skipper sailing under false

colors—sporting an alias, in fact. I smell piracy at the very least.”

The viking laughed. And his laugh was as genuine as his smile—the sort that wells up from the heart and tickles the ribs as it passes. I found myself laughing without knowing why, and Worthington grinned and wriggled like the monkey that he was.

“It’s all a matter of politics and international relations and Her Majesty the Queen and Lord Russell,” answered Captain Merrihew when our mirth had subsided. “There are tales abroad of gold and adventure to be got in the Indies the like of which has not been heard since the days of Good Queen Bess. And I mean to cast my net in those waters. In short I’m to have a go at running the American blockade.”

“And therefore the mystery and the monniker?” asked Worthington.

“Exactly. Our lady at Windsor can’t very well let officers of her navy go careering about the earth poking holes in the blockade of a friendly power, you know. But there’s nothing to prevent Arthur Merrihew asking for a year’s leave and Arthur Merry from sailing out of the port of London with a mixed cargo for St. George’s in Bermuda. Of course the old cocks at the Admiralty know what I’m about. I’m not the first to play the game. There’s that chap ‘Roberts’ who’s been running out of Charleston and Wilmington as regularly as the Royal Mail. Everyone knows that he’s Hobart-Hampden of our navy. And there’s half-a-dozen other fellows I could name.

"But the Lancashire mills need cotton and the navy itself wants turpentine and things of that sort from the Southern States of America. That business of the American Cruiser stopping the British steamer *Trent* and taking off the Confederate envoys hasn't made the Yankee any too popular, either. We accepted his apology, of course, but the thing left a bad taste. The shipping interests are on the side of the South, naturally. The blockade has crippled trade for one thing and for another I suspect our ship-owners are not sorry to see the American clippers chased off the seas by the Southern raiders.

"Liverpool made quite a hero out of Wilson of the *Emily St. Pierre*. Gave him a regular Lord Mayor's show. A silver tea and coffee service from the Mercantile Marine Association and two thousand pounds from the *Emily's* owners. I don't say he didn't deserve it and more. He fell into the hands of the Yankees off Charleston but the Yanks made the mistake of leaving Wilson and two of his men aboard the ship. They overpowered the lieutenant in command, battened down the prize crew 'tween decks and brought the *Emily* safe into Liverpool. But here's Girond with the makings of an evening."

The little Frenchman deposited on the table a great silver tray on which was an appetizing array of sparkling glass and bottles, whose discolored labels and dusty flanks commanded the veneration which all right-thinking men pay to age.

"And this blockade running is a profitable business,

I dare say?" asked Worthington, sniffing appreciatively the bouquet that rose from the ruddy contents of his glass.

"I should say so," replied Captain Merrihew. "With cotton worth its weight in gold almost in Liverpool, and arms and munitions more precious than rubies in Charleston and Wilmington. Look ye, my son, for a single successful round trip between Bermuda or Nassau and a Southern port the master of a runner gets a thousand pounds and an able-bodied seaman draws as much as the ordinary merchant skipper. That's better than rotting around Portsmouth doing nothing and being paid for what you do, eh?"

"There speaks the blood of Devon." Thus the irreverent Worthington to my horror addressed the man who had done things in the Crimea. "Drake and Raleigh and Frobisher were not averse to handling doubloons and pieces of eight. Well, here's to luck and dollars!"

But to my infinite relief our host was no wise offended.

"The blood of Devon," he said musingly half to himself. "Good blood that. And never better than when it was poured out to water the roots of England's might and glory. I wonder, Tom, if the old blood has run thin. Or if the need arose would England still find the same tough breed to fight her battles? You know the old legend that prophesies the day when England shall again have her back to the wall. Then the drums of Drake shall be heard along the coasts of

Devon and Drake shall return to lead her ships as he did against the Spaniard. That would be a day worth living for. Raleigh would be there and old Martin Frobisher and Dick Grenville and Philip Sidney. I wonder if England could muster five men like them today."

As I looked at the viking sitting there, fingering the stem of his glass and staring into the flames of the candles on the table, with my mind's eye I clothed him anew. About his neck was a stiff ruff and over his bejeweled hands fell ruffles of priceless lace. The high-backed chair in which he sat and the massive table were not out of keeping with such a picture. Nor was an antique basket-hilted sword, which hung against the panels of the cabin, and which might well have hacked and hewed at Spanish heads in its youth. Much water had flowed under London Bridge since the days when Britain's Empire was in the acorn, but I could well believe that Devon blood still flowed in Devon veins and that here was the man to prove it.

With something of a start Captain Merrihew recovered himself. "Forgive me, Mr. Holt. As Mad Tom knows, those old days are a sort of obsession with me. But that is no excuse for my inflicting them on you. And who can say but what as tall men walk the earth today? I don't know if you follow the campaigns in America, but there's as pretty fighting going on over there as the world ever saw. And out of it has come some leaders that are said to be worthy to sit in Valhalla along with Cæsar and Hannibal and Boney

and the Iron Duke. For instance, there's Jackson who was killed last year. And Lee, who's doing prodigious things against all sorts of odds. But there's one who fires my imagination most of all—Raphael Semmes."

"Semmes—the pirate?" asked Worthington.

"Yes, Semmes the pirate, if you like. Though he's no more pirate than Drake was—and possibly a good bit less. But there's a lad who's a seaman every inch. For pluck and sheer audacity I don't believe you'll find his match in any navy. Do you realize what the man has done with one ship and a crew of rag tag and bob tail picked up in the gutters of Liverpool? He and one or two others like him have swept the merchant ships of a great maritime nation off the seven seas. He has made it so hot for the Yankee ship-owners that they either keep their vessels in port or put them under foreign registry. And with half the American navy scouring the world for him, only once have they come close enough to exchange shots with him and the ship that did it caught a Tartar. But some day they'll run him down. Or what is more likely he'll get tired of dodging and offer battle—"

Again Captain Merrihew was staring into the candle flames and as he stared he hummed a tune:

"There was two lofty ships, from England they set sail—

Blow high, blow low and so sailed we!

The one she was the *Princess*, the other *Prince of Wales*—

Sailing down along the coast of the High Bar-ba-ree!"

I was to hear that brave old fore-castle song again under vastly different circumstances, but whatever glimpse of the future Captain Merrihew may have seen in the flame of his candles, I read none. To tell the truth I was at the moment somewhat concerned with preserving my reputation as a stout companion of the bottle. Captain Merrihew had kept our glasses hospitably filled; and this, atop of more than a few pints of Perkins' Entire and Worthington's specific for the good of the soul, was having its inevitable effect.

The voices of my companions came to me now clear and distinct, now muffled as though invisible hands were alternately plugging my ears with cotton wool and uncorking them. It became more and more of an effort to keep my weary eyelids from closing. But greater than my desire for sleep was my determination to bear myself well before this tremendous chap who had done something rather splendid somewhere and was on the point of being off directly to do something still more worth while in some other place.

If you have ever been a tender undergraduate attempting to support simultaneously the heavy rôle of an accomplished man of the world and an unwieldy invoice of liquors, various—you will understand my feelings.

As for that lovable donkey, Worthington, he seemed capable of consuming any given amount of assorted drinks without its having the least effect on his habitual state of genial idiocy.

One of the last things I can remember is Worthington with the utmost solemnity describing his recent election to honorary membership in the '*Ackney Coachmen's Snug and Benevolent*. It seems he had qualified for admission to this exclusive club, which met fortnightly at the Cat and Bagpipes, by an exceedingly shady device. He had represented himself as the wayward son of a former hackney coachman and as not succeeding to the paternal seat on the box owing to the folly of youth. Somewhere in the complicated narrative there figured the depraved nephew of a duke, who had seduced Worthington into adopting the calling of a bookmaker's assistant.

The fact that Worthington *père* was in reality the dean of Exminster Cathedral, while undoubtedly a fact, was as Worthington *filis* pointed out, merely a fact. And as such it carried little weight with the idealist.

"Well, my young Archbishop of Canterbury," Captain Merrihew wiped the tears of mirth from his eyes, "I look forward to being greatly edified by your first sermon."

"You might go further and hear worse," quoth the unabashed aspirant to holy orders. "When I slang the unregenerate on their sinful ways, at least I will know what I'm talking about. Not every parson does. I am now laying my plans for a very notable assault on the devil and all his works by spying out his lines, by mingling with his men (not to mention his ladies), by penetrating his inmost defences and eavesdropping on his councils. The Church Militant will find in me

a very zealous and active young officer thoroughly fitted for his work by a first-hand acquaintance with the dispositions of the enemy. If the Church Militant but knew it, it is to be congratulated. Pass the bottle."

In my then state of haziness I was much impressed by the logic of Worthington's argument. And I am not sure but what even now . . . That, however, is beside the point.

If I am not mistaken, Worthington obliged with a highly entertaining hornpipe during the progress of which he broke his spectacles. But I am not sure. The liquors, various, were now in the ascendant, and the man of the world was entering into total eclipse. A delicious melancholy was softly enwrapping me as in a mist. I sat brooding on old, and not unhappy, far off things. I wandered through ruins of ancient palaces where once I had laughed with Raleigh and Sidney and had sweet commerce with the brightest beauties of Elizabeth's train. I must go and hold communion with the night and the dark river with its fragments of broken gold. I was wandering down a long corridor so narrow that I could touch the wall on either side. I turned a corner and another and another. Now what the devil was that thumping as of a giant knocking for admittance at my door? My heart was beating with long regular pulsations that made the universe tremble. I opened my eyes. I was lying on a narrow bed. From somewhere came the ponderous rumbling of machinery and the faint smell of hot oil.

Immediately over my head was a round window through which streamed bright sunlight.

I sat up and looked out. It was broad day. London Bridge with its attendant docks and warehouses was nowhere to be seen, but only a far off river bank, low and rush-fringed. And the river bank was not stationary, but was slowly and steadily marching to the rear.

Chapter III

OUTWARD BOUND

WITH steps still a trifle unsteady and a head by no means clear I stumbled out on deck.

"So, no, a stowaway!"

I looked up to see Captain Merrihew leaning on the rail of the bridge which spanned the *Venture* amidships. "Come up and take a breath of air such as they'd pay a shilling a lungful for in London."

My embarrassment did not make my lubberly ascent to the bridge any less awkward. I felt the red rising up under my collar and creeping up the nape of my neck until I half expected to catch the odor of singeing hair.

"I am afraid, sir," I stammered, "I am afraid, sir—" I came to a dead stop. When you come to think of it there really isn't much you can say when through overindulgence in a man's hospitality you inadvertently stow away on his ship.

"Pshaw, man." The viking smiled. "There's no harm done. I'll drop you with the pilot." I could only murmur my thanks. "Of course it's our honest friend Worthington's work. When you left the cabin last night Mad Tom followed you out. He came back in

a little while saying he had turned you over to a boatman to be rowed ashore. The ass seemed sober as a judge, so naturally I took his word for it."

"I fancy it was his idea of a rag. But for all that I'm glad he did it. Only I'm afraid—"

"Oh, that be damned. I'm glad to have you for a little jaunt down the river."

Forward several seamen were battening down a hatch with its tarpaulin cover. And others were engaged in coiling ropes and going about those activities, so fascinatingly incomprehensible to a landsman, by which mariners make all "ship shape and Bristol fashion" at the beginning of a voyage. At the door of a little hutch like a superior dog kennel stood a man of honest Falstaffian girth robed in soiled apron and armed with an immense spoon. He, whom I took to be the cook, favored me and the world in general with a prolonged stare and returned to the art and mystery of his calling.

The sun was shining from a cloudless sky. And the wind, fresh from long leagues of open water, was rapidly clearing the cobwebs from my brain. There now came back, but with redoubled force, the feeling of envy I had experienced the night before. The cook, I thought, the seamen forward there, Captain Merrihew beside me—each has his duty and his place in the scheme of things. Each is a practised master of his appointed craft. In this small and self-sufficient universe afloat upon the waters I alone am alien. Pres-

ently I will be tumbled ingloriously into the pilot's boat like a piece of useless flotsam. The *Venture* will proceed on her way, bravely and serenely, to whatever lies before her, and I will be left behind.

As a small lad, I remember watching a regiment of Highlanders marching through the streets on their way to embark for the Crimea. As the last swinging kiltie disappeared round a corner and as the skirl of the pipes died away in the distance, I could have lifted up my voice and howled like a lost dog. They had been going forward to glory and I was returning to the ignoble servitude of Dr. Smallchild's Academy for Young Gentlemen. And now again I was to be left behind. No, by gad. Not if a bit of cheek would turn the trick!

Then it was I took my courage in both hands and before it could wriggle from my grasp—"I say, sir." My voice sounded loud and strident in my frightened ears. "I say, sir. Can't I go along?"

I am not tall, and Captain Merrihew seemed to look down at me from an immense height.

"This is a cargo ship and engaged on a fairly ticklish business. The owners wouldn't care to have me carrying passengers."

I gulped. "I didn't mean as a passenger."

"Not a passenger?" he repeated. "Oh, you want to sign on?"

The sense of my own temerity had robbed me of further power of speech. I nodded dumbly.

"What capacity? Any experience?"

"I haven't any experience. But I'll do anything."

"Scrub decks, fire the boilers, peel potatoes for the doctor?"

Why the medical gentleman should require potatoes peeled for him I could not imagine, but it was no time for asking questions.

"Anything, sir."

"Hm," Captain Merrihew grunted. The master of the vessel interviewing a greenhorn apprentice was a very different man from the courteous host entertaining a young gentleman from Balliol. "They aren't easy jobs nor overly clean. What do you want to go for?" I couldn't for the life of me determine whether he was serious. "Not any trouble with the police, eh?"

"No, sir." If I confessed my real reason, would he laugh? Or would he offer that stone which is so often proffered to Youth, hungry for the bread of Adventure: "You won't find much romance in the real thing. That's all book stuff." To the Merrihew of last night, the spiritual heir of the rovers and adventurers of old time, I might have bared my heart. But to this stern captain-on-the-bridge I would hardly dare tell the story of a small boy with an empty feeling under his jacket and the dying echoes of Scottish pipes in his ears. There was no need of confession, however.

"You want to go along just to see the show?"

Blushingly defiant I answered, "That's it, sir."

Through an ambuscade of tawny beard I caught the white gleam of teeth. The smile became a chuckle.

"I don't blame you. I want to see the show my-

self. I believe you said you were up to anything from the coal hole to crow's nest? Any good at figures?"

"Well, sir," I was not a little puzzled. "I can make a dab at calculus and—"

Oh, we won't call on you for anything as deep as that. What I mean is casting up accounts and dodges of that sort."

"I think so, sir."

"Good. Then I'll make you supercargo. I'm supposed to turn that work over to one of my officers and I don't know what the owners will say to paying your screw. But if they don't like it they can go whistle."

If the conferring of supreme happiness on a fellow creature is accounted for merit in heaven the recording angel entered a handsome sum to the credit of Arthur Merrihew that day. I didn't thank him. I couldn't.

"Never mind the pay, sir. I don't care if I don't draw a farthing, if you'll let me come along."

"Never sneeze at the siller, my lad. It always comes in handy in this wicked world. If you prove that you're worth your salt, I'll see that you get it and perhaps a little sugar along with it. So that's settled. You'll bunk and mess aft with the officers. There are four of us—Mr. Lamar is first officer; Mr. March, second, and Mr. MacAlpin, chief engineer."

A ruddy-faced young fellow appeared on the bridge.

"Mr. March, this is Mr. Holt," said Captain Merrihew. "He's going along with us as supercargo."

"Didn't know we were to have one, sir." March shook hands with me. "I'm sure you'll like the Ven-

ture, Mr. Holt. She's new off the ways and as pretty a ship as you'd want to see."

Young Mr. March spoke with enthusiasm. But had he been able to read my mind he would doubtless have been surprised. *Like* her? He might as well have talked to Romeo of liking Juliet. Pretty the *Venture* was, but had she been the crankiest old teakettle that ever put to sea, I would have loved her none the less. And the man who demands beauty of his first love, be she woman or ship, will never have the making of a lover or a sailor in him.

"Mr. March," directed the captain, "will you show Mr. Holt the spare cabin? And by the way"—he cast a sly glance in my direction—"if you can accommodate him with a razor and a change or so of linen I know he will be grateful. Mr. Holt joined us in rather a hurry at the last minute and his luggage failed to show up."

My new quarters proved to be the identical cabin in which I had passed the previous night. As luck would have it—the most colossal luck for me—I had stumbled into an unoccupied stateroom. Otherwise it is hardly likely that I should have escaped discovery before the *Venture* weighed anchor.

"Mess in half an hour," said March as he left me to my borrowed razor and my own reflections. That I missed cutting my throat has ever been a source of wonder to me. My toilet was completed in a state bordering on, or rather surpassing, intoxication. My brain was lapped in a warm haze such as might be

induced by some nectar distilled by the high gods to celebrate an Olympian festival of more than ordinary importance. From my open port I could see a far off shore line, and the *Venture* was beginning to respond to the heave of the seas under her forefoot. And *mirable dictu*, here was I aboard her. Twenty-four hours ago I had been John Holt, undergraduate at Balliol, with nothing ahead of me but a mild night in London. And now I was Mr. Holt, supercargo of the *Venture*, an initiate in the freemasonry of the sea.

I thought of Worthington with a vast condescension. About now he would be on a train jogging down to Oxford. And I was off for the Indies! "Off for the Indies." I repeated it aloud. There was a brave sound to the words. What would be Worthington's surprise when I failed to show up at my diggings tonight? Well, I could drop the mad fellow a line by the pilot. It would reach him before he had occasion for any anxiety as to my fate. By the same means I would communicate the change in my fortunes to my only near relative—an uncle in London. Being an orphan has its advantages sometimes.

My introduction to the rest of my "fellow officers," as I proudly thought of them, took place over the dining table. At the head sat Captain Merrihew flanked left and right by Mr. Lamar and Mr. MacAlpin. I sat at Mr. Lamar's left, and opposite was the vacant chair of the young second officer, whose watch on deck it was.

The first officer, whose speech betrayed his American

origin, appeared to be about the captain's age, thirty-five or thereabouts. His was one of those colorless complexions on which wind and weather have slight effect. His dark hair and eyes were what the ladies of that day termed "romantic." All in all a rather handsome fellow and one you would expect to be of a reserved and thoughtful temperament.

Mr. MacAlpin, the engineer, presented a striking contrast to his colleagues. He was a gray little badger of a man, with a stubby pepper-and-salt beard cut squarely off some five inches below the chin. His impassive countenance might have been hewn out of a block of oak with a hatchet, and he looked upon the world out of bleak eyes under the sharply sloping gables of bushy eyebrows. You would look for as little nonsense or imagination in Mr. MacAlpin as in one of his own engines.

Girond, he of the fierce mustachio, darted about with the cat-footed and effortless speed of the perfect servitor.

"Will mon capitaine 'ave of the rostbif with the pudding Yorkshare? Will m'sieu try the 'am? It ees vairy, vairy good. Du thé? Parfaitement, m'sieu." Girond's manner of presenting a dish would have made far plainer fare than that provided by the *Venture's* cook acceptable. It was the suppressed enthusiasm of the amateur who points out the perfections of a work of art. It was a sauce which, could it be bottled, would make a dozen fortunes for Messrs. Lea & Perrins.

The captain, as was natural, led the conversation, at-

tempting, as I thought, to put his new messmates at their ease. Mr. Lamar responded with a courteous gravity and Mr. MacAlpin with a brevity bordering on gruffness. "Aye, sir" and "No, sir" delivered in good Edinburgh Scots were his principal contribution to the amenities. But for all that, it was the taciturn engineer who dropped a disturbing stone into the placid waters of the small talk.

Mr. MacAlpin, having attended to the stowing away of a goodly cargo of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, was now ready to turn his mind to other matters.

"Have you obsairved the look of the smoke from our stacks, Captain Merry?" he asked.

"Not particularly," responded the captain.

"When we cleared this morning 'twas a gray smoke, no darker than a wreath of fog. Now, it's rolling out of the funnels as mirk as the pit. As I came on deck about eight bells I noticed the black reek of it. No Welsh coal ever mined gave off smoke like that. I made haste below and took a keek in the bunkers. And sure enough there's good Welsh coal on top, but underneath 'tis poor mucky Newcastle stuff."

Mr. Lamar leaned forward: "You mean it will cut down our speed?"

"It's not sae much that," replied the engineer. "It can get ten or twelve or even fourteen knots out of her even with puir coal. It's the veesibility I'm thinking of. When we are running for Chairleston or Wilmington 'twill be no advantage to have the *Venture* sending up a column of black smoke and bringing the Yankee

cruisers down on us. 'Twas Welsh coal that was specified and I'll be bound 'twas Welsh coal that was paid for."

"There's nothing else that will show the same light smoke?"

"Nothing else except Pennsylvania anthracite. And for reasons of their ain the Yankees aren't shipping any to Bermuda."

"I will go below with you and have a look at those bunkers if you are ready, Mr. MacAlpin." Captain Merrihew strode from the saloon followed by the engineer. Mr. Lamar and I, who had risen with the captain, resumed our chairs.

"Captain Merry seemed to take it rather splendidly, don't you think, sir?" I ventured. "Evidently 'some-one has blundered.' Yet he didn't get in a wax about it."

A smile played momentarily about the first officer's lips without disturbing the gravity of his face. "From all I have seen of Captain Merry I should say he is an exceptional officer. The traditional type of navy martinet, who swells like a turkey gobbler and swears like a trooper at the least provocation, commands the admiration only of the thoughtless. The ideal leader is coolest when things go wrong. Otherwise how can he hope to instil confidence in his men in the face of danger or emergency? Personally I would follow Captain Merry into a fight with a thousand times more confidence than one of those blustering fellows. I never

could see why a susceptibility to masculine hysterics was considered a quality of leadership."

He produced a cigar case and offered me a slender cheroot. For some time we sat smoking quietly. Mr. Lamar soon lapsed into a meditative silence, giving me an excellent opportunity to study his pale clean-shaven face. Not age alone, I thought, had graven the lines so deeply on his forehead or frosted his temples. Of course, now I know what it was. But even then, youngster that I was, and ignorant of his history, I recognized in him something which set him apart from the gross feeding materialists that are the generality of men. His were the unhappy eyes of the thinker. The biblical story about the eating of the fruit of the tree isn't mere legend by a long shot, but a parable of the deepest truth. The man who turns from the simple animal life of action led by his fathers for a thousand generations, to ask questions of God, damns himself to certain unhappiness. Did you, by any chance, ever hear of an optimistic philosopher, a cheerful prophet, or a contented intellectual? But Mr. Lamar's sadness was not the ordinary liver trouble of the soul induced by introspection. It was something infinitely deeper than that. As I say, even at our first meeting, I read him as one with a capacity for suffering beyond the common lot, and I was not quite easy in his presence—then or after.

Not having the remotest idea of the duties of a super-cargo, I spent the afternoon in getting acquainted with

the ship—*my* ship. I descended into the darkness of the inferno where Mr. MacAlpin's swart demons fed coal into the gaping red maws of fiery-breathed dragons and where the engineer himself treated me to a lecture on engines that left my brain reeling and my ears humming with mechanical terms which were not Greek to me, but Sanscrit.

I looked in on the cook in his glorified dog-house, where he stirred vindictively at the soup in a great kettle and sprinkled it with pepper as though each pungent grain was a black curse of Cromwell. Like most knights of the pot and pan, ours was a cross-grained fellow. Perhaps the heat from their stoves gets into their dispositions. Or it may be that the constant criticisms, with which their creations are greeted, gives them the dour outlook of other misunderstood artists.

A dark cavern forward turned out to be the fore-castle. And peeking in, I was hailed by a hearty voice from the gloomy interior, which inquired politely how I did. From the rich Irish brogue in which this inquiry was couched I took the inquirer to be none other than my acquaintance of the previous evening who had been "perishin' of cold and growing webfooted from trampin' a wet deck." I hoped that he had finally been gratified with the drop or two left sticking to the bottom of the bottles I had assisted in emptying.

What occurred during the remainder of that eventful day has long since faded from my memory, but one incident stands out in bold relief.

The sun had dipped behind a low bank of cloud

which floated on the western horizon, leaving behind him a memorial in crimson and gold. Neither sail nor headland broke the emptiness of the sea. Only off the starboard quarter there rose a range of jagged rocks, like the dorsal fins of a school of sharks, black and glistening with the spray which dashed over them.

"Bishop's Rocks," said a voice behind me, "and the last of old England." I turned to find Captain Merrihew wrapped in a dark boatcloak. "Do you know, I envy you." He might have been addressing Bishop's Rocks, as he kept his eyes fixed on them. "The first day of your first voyage. Drink deep of the moment. You can never be outward bound for the first time again."

He leaned his elbow on the rail and turned to face the sunset. "Crimson and gold. It might stand for blood and broad pieces—or power and glory—according to one's temperament. Drake and Raleigh and old Martin Frobisher looked on those same rocks as they followed that same old sun over the edge of the west. It's good to be sailing in their wake. We aren't sailing with shotted guns, and there won't be any tall ships to board with pike and cutlass. These aren't the roaring days of Good Queen Bess and neutrality is neutrality. But still the Yankees may show us a bit of sport perhaps, and by the brass-bound Davy Jones, we'll lead 'em a chase, friend Holt, we'll lead 'em a chase!"

He gripped my elbow in a friendly vise. His sudden smile broke from behind his beard and without await-

ing any reply he swung away down the deck, his cloak fluttering in the wind.

Is it strange that I was his liege man and did him service from that time forth? Then, I knew only that I should follow this man and render him obedience gladly. Now I know why it was. He was of that company of the elect who are blessed with lasting youth—a youth which thrives and matures under trials and experience rather than shrivels and dies. I imagine most of the first captains among men had in them that quality even though disguised under gray beards. Only youth has the tireless energy, the audacity, the touch of the dramatic, whereby the men in the mass are swayed. Battles are fought by young men. Age can drive youth, but only youth can lead it.

And so the *Venture* pursued the crimson and gold glory that beckoned her onward. And for me it was the evening of the First Day. And I made a vow.

Chapter IV

JONAH

"Boney was a warrior—*Away, ay-yah—*
A warrior and a tarrier—*John Franswor.*"

THE group seated on the forward hatch-covering swayed back and forth, stamping their heavy boots on the deck and roaring with Gargantuan laughter. It was the social hour at sea which began at eight bells in the evening watch. Then it was the fiddler and the chanteyman had their innings and gray-bearded shell-backed Homers spun epic yarns more ancient even than themselves. Fearsome and wonderful lies that had been hoary with age and sea salt when these ancient mariners, as round-eyed ship's-boys, had heard them first. Then it was that the bridge, behind its after-dinner cigars and pipes, did not disdain to eaves-drop on the evening musicales of the forecastle.

As the *Venture* pursued her southwesterly course the increasing warmth of the nights had indicated the forward hatch as preferable to the forecastle for these social gatherings. Cahill, the fiddler upon this alfresco occasion, is worth a paragraph or so to himself.

Irish as a peat bog, he was, with a red, good-humored face framed in a fringe of carrotty whiskers. "A

shirker," Mr. Lamar characterized him. "But worth his salt as a fiddler and chanteyman," added Captain Merrihew. "There's nothing like one of these minstrels of the sea to keep a crew hearty and contented and willing. I have seen a good chanteyman get more work out of men tailing on a rope by one good lively heave-hoing song, than a dozen officers could by bawling their lungs out. He exerts a good influence in the forecask, too. Jack's a simple soul, take him by and large, and he'd rather listen to a good song than the sedition, privy conspiracy and rebellion, false doctrine, heresy and schism of a sea lawyer."

And so by virtue of his talents Cahill (the "big head" of my first acquaintance with the *Venture*, by the by) was treated with leniency by the bridge and with extreme consideration by the forecask. A good half of his duties, I am convinced, were performed by some willing volunteer while the bard took his lordly ease. His was the gentle tongue which could cozen choice tidbits from the misanthropic cook and a "drop o' the creetur" from the severely incorruptible Girond.

On this particular evening he sat, his fiddle resting on his knee after the manner of a miniature cello, sawing valiantly. In a voice round and deep as a stout oak cask, he was singing:

"Boney fought the Rooshians"—

"*Away, ay-YAH!*"—his auditors shouted the chorus.

"Boney fought the Prooshians"—

"John Franswor!"

"Boney went to Elbow"—

"Away, ay-yah!"

"Boney he came back again"—

"John Franswor!"

"Boney went to Waterloo"—

"Away, ay-yah!"

"Boney got his overthrow—

"John Franswor!"

At each repetition of "John Franswor" the populace howled with delight and thumped each other on the back, while even the cook's vast frame quivered uneasily as if he were indulging in subterranean chuckles. They were playing a game which in spite of many repetitions never failed to afford them infinite amusement. This innocent diversion was variously called "drawing the badger" or "fetching Frenchy."

On former occasions the excitable Girond had been content to thrust his head from the window of his cubby and hurl epithets, untranslatable flowers culled from Parisian gutters, at the offenders' heads. This time there must have been an unusually insulting quality in the laughter which proceeded from the forward hatch. At all events, Monsieur Girond sallied forth, a napkin in one hand and in the other a glass he had been polishing.

"Unspeakable goddams! That for you!" He hurled the glass to the deck and ground the fragments beneath his heel. "And you"—he pointed a trembling finger at Cahill—"who I 'ave make droonk like a lord,

like a hearl, like a king, you insult me, Jean-Jacques Girond!"

"Ah, now, me little man," replied the Irishman soothingly, "there's no offence intended. Where's the harm in a scrape o' me fiddle to amuse the boys?"

"Then you shall make a scrape of the fid' to amuse me. Look at. Can you play zis?" Girond hummed the tag of a tune.

"Can I play that, and it *We won't go home till morning?* 'Tis me old father taught me the go of it whin I was no bigger than his thumb." And he broke into the roistering air that has been bellowed over bottle and bowl since time was.

Girond swept the circle of his auditors with a look of superb disdain, while each hair of moustache and pompadour seemed to bristle with a separate and distinct defiance. Then with one had on hip and feet well apart he threw back his head and lifted up his voice in a spirited and penetrating if slightly nasal tenor.

*"Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre,
Miron-ton, miron-ton, miron-taine."*

Throughout the stirring, if historically inaccurate, recital of the defeat and death of Marlborough at the hands of the French, the singer accompanied himself with appropriate gestures. Unfortunately for the effect, however, the gesturing hand still clutched the napkin, and as song and singer waxed ever more mar-

tial and heroic the more the napkin resembled a white flag waved in a very ecstasy of surrender.

The recital ended amid the most impressive silence. The honest sailormen, including the accompanist, sat as if transfixed. Gradually the relaxed jaws and rounded eyes resumed their normal state. Girond reviewed the stricken field with the triumphant air of a victorious general. Then the vast mountain of the cook labored and heaved and brought forth not a mouse indeed but a husky squeak as of a mouse suffering from influenza.

"A 'ighly hentertaining and hartistic performance, I calls it. But 'ow are we supposed to laugh w'en we don't know wot the joke's all about?"

"The doctor's right," exclaimed several voices in concert.

"Joke! I vill tell you se joke, obscene garbage. It his about ze gr-r-eat Anglich Duke of Mar-r-lborough, and 'ow ze French knock him into a squashed hat. Now laugh." Girond's laugh was truly Mephistophelean in its barbed sarcasm.

"Wot?" squeaked the cook. "A Englishman knocked out by a parcel o' Frenchies? It ain't 'istoric-al. Wot's more it don't stand to reason, so it don't. No Englishman ever was done in by a Frenchman. Didn't the Duke of Wellington put Boney in quod at Elbow? And didn't William the Orange beat the Mounseers at 'Astings a 'undred years ago or longer than that? And didn't Nelson, a little fellow no bigger

than wot you are and with only one arm and one eye—”

With a shriek Girond flung himself upon the historian. But the big man for all his weight was remarkably active. Rising to his feet he seized the Frenchman by the front of his white jacket and held him at arm's length while Girond's fists flailed the air some inches short of the cook's nose.

“Come aht of it,” wheezed the cook. “T'd put yer in the kettle and make yer into soup only you reminds me of my 'appy home. The missus 'as a tom cat, she 'as, wot looks remarkably like you. Except”—the uxorious husband considered the matter gravely—'e's a bit 'andsomer.”

At this stage of the controversy the good-natured Cahill intervened. I was too far away to hear what he said, but his pacific efforts were effective. I saw the two erstwhile foes shake hands handsomely and depart in company with the peacemaker, and I have no doubt that the last traces of enmity were drowned in a loving cup of Girond's providing.

During the ten days or so we had now been at sea I had progressed astonishingly in my seamanship. At least I astonished myself. Whether my instructor was likewise filled with amazement at my facility I had no means of knowing. With our stores and cargo already safely beneath the hatches, my duties as supercargo had not been burdensome. I had therefore embraced with the greatest eagerness Captain Merrihew's suggestion that I devote my spare time to the acquirement

of the vastly more exciting and romantic study of navigation. Under the tutelage of Mr. Lamar I boxed the compass, and shot the sun with an uncertain but steadily improving aim. I became acquainted with Mercator's Projection, which so disturbingly upsets one's geographical conceptions by spreading the round earth to the thinness of paper, to the great enhancement of Labrador and the alarming shrinkage of Equatorial Africa. With pencil and paper I started on suppositious voyages from Singapore to London only to find myself, at the end, hard aground off the Shetlands or cruising serenely across France.

But I found the first officer a singularly patient and helpful teacher. And like any tutor who is more than a machine for the phonographic rendition of text books, Mr. Lamar was given at times to departing from the subject in hand. A discussion which began with tides and currents of the ocean was like as not to end with the tides and currents in the affairs of men. And it was during these excursions that I came to know more of our second in command.

I remember once we had laid our books aside in favor of Mr. Lamar's cheroots. How, I don't know, we stumbled onto the word "duty."

"Duty." Mr. Lamar's haggard eyes stared at the wall opposite. He shook his head with that smile I had learned to know. A smile that had in it nothing of mirth, not even of the sardonic or the bitter, but a sadness deeper than any mere gravity of expression could portray. "Duty," he repeated. "If only the path of

duty were marked with an unmistakable signboard. Do you know, I can scarcely conceive of a man's deliberately turning his back on duty that he knew was duty beyond the shadow of a doubt. I think the worst and weakest of us could brave the greatest dangers and the severest hardships if we knew in every fibre of soul and body we are right, right." He was silent a moment staring at the wall with those haggard eyes of his. When he resumed it was almost in a whisper. "But too often when you come to the crossroads you don't know which road is which. And you won't know until the end. Maybe not then, even."

"But sometimes," I persisted, "you *do* know. There isn't any room for doubt."

"I wonder," said Mr. Lamar, "whether any man ever made a really momentous decision and went forward without casting a single doubtful glance back over his shoulder." He paused. "Do you mind if I talk a little about myself? I am a Virginian. If you were an American that would explain a lot to you, especially when I say that the best years of my life were spent as an officer in the United States Navy. I was younger than you are by a good three years, I should say, when I left home for the Naval Academy at Annapolis. I loved the service. It was more to me than a profession. It was a religion.

"Then came the war, bringing with it a terrible decision which every Southern man in either army or navy had to make. The choice between his loyalty to home and kin on the one hand—his loyalty to his

messmates and the traditions of his service on the other. The decision could not have been easy for any of us. Some decided one way and some another. But I wonder how many were completely satisfied that they had followed the plain path of duty."

"But after all—" remember I was young with all the cocksureness of youth—"you felt one side was right and the other wrong?"

Mr. Lamar's smile was more heavily freighted with sadness than before, if such a thing were possible. "It has been my misfortune to read history. Don't do it. It unsettles your notions of right and wrong in political questions. It sets you to speculating. Who was right? Charles First or Cromwell? George Third or George Washington? Who is right today? The Irish rebel or the English judge who hangs him? North or South? Or neither?"

"Yet, you have chosen sides?"

"Yes, because I felt that neutrality was cowardice. That is the deepest tragedy of civil strife—of all war, for that matter. You can't be neutral. Yet for the life of me I cannot believe that the questions at issue in this war are worth the price. A union which can be maintained only at the cost of thousands of human lives had better be dissolved. A union that can be severed only by bloodshed had better be endured."

He brought his clenched fist down on the table. "At bottom it isn't even a question of Union or States' Rights. The thousands of men who have died and the thousands who are yet to die are human sacrifices

to the stiff-necked pride of two cities—Boston and Charleston.”

I begged him to explain.

“Pardon my heat. Of course you are unacquainted with American politics. You see this as a struggle over a principle. It isn’t. Hate, jealousy, contempt are not principles, though they are the only principles over which men are willing to shed blood.

“Here are these two cities, Boston and Charleston—a thousand miles apart actually and half a world between them in sympathies and traditions. Cavalier and Puritan are just words in your history books in England. But that two-hundred-year-old feud which burnt itself out generations ago over there, has been smouldering ever since in Boston and Charleston. Even the Revolution failed to bring them together. Here is Boston poisoned with self-righteousness and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, thanking God it isn’t as other men and taking up collections to send poor crazy old John Brown to do murder in the name of the great Jehovah. They thought it was slavery they hated. It was the aristocratic arrogance of the South. Anybody but a blind fanatic would have known that slavery was doomed anyway. It was dying on its feet. But Boston wasn’t willing to let it die. They wanted to stand at Armageddon and do battle for the Lord. I wonder how many abolitionists, by the way, stood at Gettysburg. Not many, I reckon.

“And Charleston. Proud as hidalgos, and as hospitable and courteous, are the Charlestonians. They

will drink while there's a drop in the bottle and fight at the drop of the hat. And in the gentlest and most refined voices in the world they can swear like fiends. And do. Amiable madmen—monomaniacs on the divine right of the Carolinian. You can guess how little the Charlestonians would brook interference from a breed they despised as psalm-singing hypocrites.

"Imagine the result when the gentleman from Massachusetts and the gentleman from South Carolina meet in Congress, each determined to make the nation over to fit his creed. New England flint and steel striking sparks over a Carolina powder barrel. I, sir, am but one of the unhappy results."

He pushed back his chair and stood looking down at me. "Forgive me. I'm afraid I've bored you. But I feel too deeply on the subject—"

The more I had seen of this man the more I had been attracted to him. I think of him still as an example of that rarest product and final flower of civilization—a gentleman. His flawless courtesy and good breeding were not garments assumed to clothe the ugly nakedness of a savage, but were part of the man himself—the outward and visible signs of a genuine consideration for others. In my time I have met perhaps a round dozen of gentlemen and thereby consider myself unusually fortunate. Not all of them were faultless in the unessential matters of their English or their dress. One of them was a common laborer. But all were as impeccable as it is given man to be, in gentleness and honorable dealings. They were in truth to

the manner born. Had they not been, they could no more have been gentlemen than the man born stupid may become intelligent. I hope you know now what kind of man Mr. Lamar was or at least how he impressed me. And if I have wearied you in my endeavor to explain exactly what I meant when I said he was a gentleman, the fault is not mine. It is the words most commonly in men's mouths that soonest lose their rightful clarity and force and require the most painstaking definition.

But much as his personality attracted me, Mr. Lamar was wrapped in a chilling atmosphere that repelled advances. It was something more than reserve. It was a though a malignant familiar spirit stood at his elbow, a jealous demon who warned off the would-be trespasser. I was not the only one to notice this quality in our first officer. One evening on deck Captain Merrihew fell into step beside me. "Young Holt"—latterly he had taken to addressing me thus in an elder-brotherly fashion—"how comes the art of navigation?"

"Mr. Lamar is kind enough to say that I am making progress, sir."

"You couldn't have a better teacher, I venture to say. Excellent officer, Mr. Lamar. Capable man in every way. But not a friendly chap, would you say? I've taken particular pains to cultivate him. It never does any harm for a commander to have the friendship of his lieutenants. Besides, he is the sort of man one is

disposed to like. But I must say that I haven't gotten very far under his shell."

"I feel a good bit the same way about him, sir," I replied. "It's like seeing a chap and thinking, 'Here's old so-and-so, I'll have a chin with him.' And you go to shake hands with him and find he isn't the chap you thought he was but a perfect stranger."

"Very well put. But don't you know it's shocking bad discipline for a young cub to be criticizing his superior officer? There's only one thing worse and that's for the captain of the ship to discuss the cub's elders and betters with the cub. Come down to my cabin and we will find some more suitable topic of conversation. The relative merits of port and sherry, for instance."

That too was shocking bad discipline, as most naval men and all senior clerks in City offices will readily allow. Of course Lord Nelson had this same eccentric habit of treating his officers and even his men as human beings. But then, the hero of Trafalgar was a notoriously undisciplined character. We have only to recall his disregard of the order to retreat on a certain memorable occasion.

Once more before we reached our destination, the Port of St. George's in Bermuda, I was to hear an allusion to the shadow which dogged the footsteps of the first officer and from a most unexpected source. I had been raised to the dignity of standing a regular watch on deck and in my watch was the accomplished

Cahill. For some reason, in spite of his reputation for laziness, I felt that the Irishman was a thorough seaman and it was to him I turned for many a helpful bit of advice just as the young subaltern who is wise in his generation will make a confidant of some hard-bitten old sergeant, learned in the lore of camp and field. And it was Cahill who, leaning against a bulwark and plaiting a bit of frayed rope's end with marvelously dextrous fingers, spoke of Mr. Lamar.

"Do you belave in Jonahs, Mr. Holt?" he asked.

"What do you mean, Cahill?" I asked.

"I mane, sir, do you belave in misfortunate ones as bring bad luck to a ship, so that trouble follows her wake like the sharks do be following a ship with a dead corpse in her?"

"No," I laughed. "Do you?"

"Me old mither," said Cahill, never leaving off his weaving nor taking his blue and childlike gaze from the horizon, "was a terrible gifted woman. They do be saying that she had second sight. There was never a death in our village but she had heard the banshee wailin'. And should any woman be wantin' to know if it were to be a boy or a girl 'twas Biddy Cahill could be tellin' her. An' it may be that I can see shadows where other folk see only the blessed sun."

"Well, at any rate there's no Jonah aboard the *Venture*," I said.

"Mr. Holt, askin' your pardon, but that's as may be. If we come safe through this voyage without bein' sunk in the deep sea by reason of a storm or a cannon

shot, 'tis Danny Cahill will be the thankful one. Ye see this deck as white as linen bleachin' in the sun? There'll be black blood on it. An' there's them walkin' the deck this day that will be goin' overside with a lump of coal to their heels."

I am not superstitious. And that was a hard-headed day and age if ever there was one. Sir Arthur and Sir Oliver had not yet taken to raising the spirits of the dead and shaking our faith in the ability of the human eye to see everything that is going on all over the ship. But I must confess that to hear the blithe minstrel of the fore-castle croaking evil like a minor prophet gave me the hump.

"And whose blood is it?" I asked. I trust my skepticism was apparent in my tone.

"How will I be tellin'?" Cahill shook his head. "When ye come upon blood in the road ye say, 'There's been blood spilt,' but can ye say whose, or who spilled it?"

"Rubbish, Cahill," I cried. "You don't expect me to believe that sort of gammon?"

"No, sir, I don't. You have book learnin'. An' scholars, even when they are priests, are famous mis-believers. But I only thought 'twas my duty to be tellin' ye that the fore-castle is talkin'."

This would never do. I felt the weight of my responsibility as an officer—the more keenly perhaps because it was strange to my shoulders.

"See here, Cahill." I congratulated myself that my manner was quarter-deck, first quality. "We are taking

on a job that calls for pluck on the part of everyone. I don't want you to go feeding the men a lot of moonshine about Jonahs and ill luck and getting them jumpy."

"'Tis never a word I've said to any soul but you, Mr. Holt. For why should I be puttin' nightmares under their pillows? If so be there's a Jonah aboard, misfortune will be on us soon enough an' talkin' won't mend it. So 'tis little they get out o' me unless it will be the scrape of me fiddle or a bit of a song."

"Yet you say they are talking—what about?"

"Tis only the rats, so far."

"The rats?"

"Yes, sir. Ye've noticed, or it may be you ain't, there's no hide nor hair of a rat been seen on this ship from the day we sailed."

"Well," I said, "I for one can excuse them. The *Venture* is a new vessel and I suppose that accounts for the absence of rats. But what are the men grumbling about? Do they want the beastly things?"

"You'll have heard," Cahill replied, "of rats desertin' a sinkin' ship. 'Twas once I was aboard a ship tied up to the dock at Liverpool. And one day we saw an old gray rat come whiskin' out of her hawse hole and go skippin' along the hawser to the wharf like the devil was singeing the tail of him. And behind him was a thousand other rats—big ones and little ones—gray and brown and black—with the childer ridin' on the backs of their dams. Wid that we held a palaver in the forecastle an' ten or a dozen of us went to the

skipper. 'Sir,' say we, 'tis flyin' in the face o' Providence to go to sea in this ship, an' be this an' that we ain't goin'. So by yer leave we'll be steppin' ashore.'

"She's a stout ship," says he.

"She is so," says we, 'but she won't be long.'

"Her seams is tight as a miser's fist," says he.

"They be that," says we, 'but the rats has had a forewarnin' an' we'll be followin' after them.'

"Ye're a faint-hearted lot o' rascals," he says, 'an' foolisher than the rats theirselves.'

"Thin we'll be shoulderin' our dunnage and followin' our betters onto terror firmer," says us, which likewise we did. She sailed short handed by reason that the skipper couldn't find many men in Liverpool willin' to sign on her an' her havin' the bad name she did. He even offered double pay but there wasn't many takers. An' after a while they posted her at Lloyds as missin', an' not so much as a stove-in boat or a bit of wreckage did she leave behind to tell what happened to her.

"'Tis bad enough when rats leave a ship, but what are ye goin' to say about a ship they won't set foot to?" Cahill spat gloomily into the sea.

"And about this Jonah, do you know who he is?" I asked.

"It may be," said Cahill cautiously. "You can tell one by the look in his eyes the same as yer can spot one that's done a murder. I mind a ship I sailed in once. The bosun had just such eyes as That One. An' there was mutiny before we was through an' men

lyin' dead on the deck an' some came to the gallows by it. But this time it's worse, That One bein' who he is. The higher placed a man is an' him a Jonah, the sorrier it be for the ship an' them as sails in her."

"Cahill," I said. "To look at you no one would ever suspect that you were such a damned old woman."

"Yes, sir," said Cahill.

"And now you've begun all this rot you might as well tell me who this precious Jonah of yours is."

For a moment the Irishman remained silent as if unwilling to proceed. "If ye'll not betray me I'll tell you." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "'Tis him that has his eyes on you this blessed minute."

I glanced round. Mr. Lamar was standing on the bridge looking down upon us.

Chapter V

ONE GODDESS-LIKE AMONG WOMEN

At first it was merely a bit of color against the background of cotton bales piled high on the quay of St. George's. But as the boat raced shoreward under the impetus given it by sailormen with the savor of the fleshpots in their nostrils, the splash of color took shape and became a woman.

Even before I was near enough to form any idea of her appearance I was struck by a certain air of expectancy in her attitude. With one hand shading her eyes she seemed to be scanning our boat as if in search of a familiar figure. As we drew on, the hand which had shielded her eyes against the intensity of the sun upon the water, dropped to her side, though she continued to gaze in our direction. But the tiptoe eagerness seemed to have departed and expectation faded into mere interest.

But if the tide of her emotion was on the ebb, mine was on the flood. At first I had experienced only a natural curiosity aroused by her searching scrutiny. However as she let fall the hand which obscured her features, I so far forgot myself as to fix upon her a stare that may very well have offended by its

impudence. Not that I thought of it at the time.

The men had shipped their oars and the boat's gunwale was bumping gently against the pilings of the wharf. And still I sat there in the stern sheets, looking up at her—in all probability with my jaw dropped. And at the head of the stairs leading down to the water stood she looking down at me. If I cared to, I might pretend to describe her costume. But to what good end would be the pretense? If I had been asked the moment she passed from my view whether her gown was blue or green or brown I could not have answered. It might have been bright red for all I know.

It stands to reason that she was dressed in one of those ridiculous lamp shades of crinoline, with which fashion in a mood of ribald irreverence chose to disfigure the one thing that all men in all ages have looked upon as the highest expression of beauty. But my first memory of her is happily unmarred by any element of the grotesque. I image her as standing there above me, tall and deep-bosomed, while her blown-black garments mould themselves to the splendor of her body. There is an impression of lips not too thin and slightly parted as if about to speak. Of eyes blue, not deeply blue but of a pale violet shade such as I have never seen before or since. Strange eyes, far sighted and piercing, like a sibyl's. And above she was bareheaded, to that at least I'll swear—a gleam of hair in heavy coils and glinting in the sun like a bronze helmet.

At this distance of time she is something of an

allegory, symbolic of pride and strength and courage, and with it all, of beauty and womanliness. Perhaps that is why I think of her in the garb and pose of the Winged Victory—but, thanks be, a Winged Victory not of cold marble, but warm living flesh and with a head to match the wonder of the rest of her. I thought of Homer's description of Helen, "one goddess-like among women." As I sat there looking up, I knew what he meant by it.

There she stood looking down at me with no hint of self-consciousness or offended dignity. Just looking. The cool gaze of her acted on me like a dash of cold water in my face. Coming to my senses with an actual gasp and supremely conscious of my bad manners, I strove to hide my confusion by giving some order or other to the men. Then, determined to make no further spectacle of myself, I stumbled up the stairs.

With eyes straight to the fore and in all the dignity of my years (and what dignity is as the dignity of the toga viriles?), I marched past her. She had even to retreat a little, I think, from her position at the head of the steps, to make way for me. No, I would not bestow even a passing glance on the vision I had looked on already too long and with too scant courtesy.

"Pardon me, sir." The voice was deep, for a woman's, unhasty and mellow like the D string of a violin. My heart stopped, shied like a frightened horse and set off at a gallop that came near to strangling me. In the act of turning I clutched my cap. But had it been a living thing with claws twisted in my hair it could not

have resisted more effectively my efforts to dislodge it. At length with a despairing wrench of my dead and nerveless fingers I succeeded in removing the miserable object from my bewildered head.

"Pardon me," she was saying again and there was a hint of white teeth striving to compose the ripe fullness of a lip disposed to tremble. Could it be with annoyance? Or even more dreadful thought—with amusement? "May I ask what ship that is?"

"The *Venture* of London, ma'am," I replied. It was fortunate that nothing more was needful, since my throat was throbbing painfully and the fountain of my eloquence run dry.

"Thank you, sir. And is there a Mr.—" the slightest hesitation—"Quintard aboard? He would be first officer, I believe." Oh, that there had been a Mr. Quintard aboard and that I were he!

"I'm sorry, but our first officer is Mr. Lamar." Then hurrying on desperately, fearful that she might close the interview, "Were you expecting Mr. Quintard on the *Venture*? He may have been on the ship and left her for some reason. I don't know. You see I only joined the day we sailed."

She smiled, and with that smile the goddess became a beautiful and engaging woman. I racked my brain for a further excuse to linger.

"I would be delighted to inquire if Mr. Quintard was ever on the *Venture*. Mr. Lamar, if he took his place, might know something of him or possibly Captain Merry.

"If it would not be too much trouble."

I hastened to assure her it would be the furthestest from any trouble in the world.

"I think perhaps Mr.—what did you say the name of the first officer was?—might know."

"Quite likely indeed. I will ask him as soon as I go aboard this afternoon. And where may I communicate with you?" Ah, John Holt, for shame. You with so innocent a youthful front and yet so deeply guileful.

"A note will reach me addressed to Miss Tempest." Again the smile. "You won't forget the name if you will remember 'a tempest in a teacup.' I've been called that." Again the smile—this time the teasing, impish grin of a schoolgirl.

"As if I could"—I began and brought up aghast at what I was about to say. There are times when perfect sincerity may be bouncing, brazen, barefaced effrontery.

"As if you could find me in the metropolis of St. George's without knowing my address? It is—" The address has long since been buried under the accumulated rubbish of the years; but, you may well believe, at the time it was imprinted on my memory. I was firmly resolved that any intelligence concerning Mr. Quintard, which I might be fortunate enough to unearth, would not be entrusted to any agent as unreliable as Her Majesty's Post. And even if I should be obliged to report the absolute failure of my mission—well, my chief concern lay less in the meat of my message

than in securing for myself the office of messenger.

Another hurried review of possible topics of conversation. "I wonder," I ventured, "if you could direct me to the counting house of Messrs. Frazer, Trenholm & Co.?"

"I will do better than that, if you like. I am passing there on my way to the market. Only you will have to brave the wrath of Miranda."

"Not the wrath of a dozen Mirandas, whoever she may be—"

"Come along then." Through a maze of cotton bales piled high on every available foot of the dock we made our way. From the snowy close-packed fibre protruding through the ragged, coarse brown bagging, rose a faint sweet perfume. Black stevedores bare of arm and throat, bull-necked and bullet-headed, their muscles rippling under their flimsy singlets, strove with the bales. A Hercules done in glistening black marble raised his voice in a long-drawn chant which seemingly consisted of a single line endlessly repeated:

"I'm bound for Alabama, oh roll dat cotton down."

And under the inspiration of the music his fellows pulled and hauled and tumbled ignominiously to the planking of the dock wealth for which solid citizens in Liverpool and Manchester would be laying down a king's ransom.

Through yet other mazes of crates and boxes and barrels, we attained the street—a thoroughfare noisy and colorful as an Oriental bazaar. Carts piled high with merchandise were locked wheel to wheel in an in-

extricable tangle, while the philosophic mules who drew them and their fatalistic darkey drivers awaited the miracle which would bring order out of chaos. Let the white man work himself into a frenzy over delayed sailings and demurrage. Tomorrow was another day.

Fruit sellers presided over barrows heaped high with the strange treasures of tropical forests, garnered from every island in the Indies. Primitive cook-shops, consisting of a charcoal brazier and a board on which to display the wares, offered up their incense of fried fish and frizzled pork. There were seamen with the eager gaze of fox terriers and the rolling gait of elephants, zealously, joyously and awkwardly intent on squeezing the last drop of adventure from their shore leaves. There were red coats from the garrison, as like, one to the other, as so many tin soldiers. Uniform even to the jaunty angle of the forage cap and the twist of the moustache. Identical even to the expression of unhappy boredom which is the habitual expression of the warrior temporarily on his own with no sergeant-major to guide him.

There were girls, whose eye-play and over-enthusiastic garments bespoke them little nuns of Venus. There were soberly conducted black house-servants with basket on arm chaffering with the street merchants. And by contrast, dusky belles and dashing bucks enjoying the leisure and glad raiment made possible by an unprecedented rise in wages, whereby two days' labor insured four days of butterfly existence.

Such was my first glimpse of St. George's in the

heyday of its Golden Age, when by the fortunes of war, the heavens opened and rained guineas in the streets of the little city which had slumbered quietly for two centuries and more. As was inevitable the hitherto decorous little port had become intoxicated with her sudden prosperity and galled herself unto herself the adventurers and adventuresses, the rag tag and bob tail, from Dan to Beersheba, and with them was behaving wantonly.

From a knot of gossiping house-servants there detached herself a dark Amazon, who in height and girth resembled a grenadier grown great with years and good living. On her head was a red bandanna, turbanwise, and from her ears great golden crescents a-dangle. On her arm was an empty basket and on her brow was seated wrath, majestic and awe-inspiring.

"Miranda," said Miss Tempest with a poorly suppressed giggle. And with a free swinging stride very different from the mincing toddle I was accustomed to expect in young ladies, she was off. With the audible snort of an aggrieved hippopotamus Miranda got under way; and thereafter the creak of her basket and a continuous muttering as of distant thunder served as a constant reminder of the presence of a hostile and watchful duenna.

Even so dark a cloud as Miranda, however, was not without its proverbial lining of silver. More than once I thought to surprise a gleam of delightful mischief in the eyes of my enchantress. And but for the pleasure

she took in outraging the propriety of her severe handmaiden, I doubt if Miss Tempest had greeted my attempts at wit with such delicious ripples of laughter or bestowed such flattering attention on my more profound remarks anent the state of the weather and the beauty and strangeness of St. George's. This judgment is, of course, in the light of an afterthought. At the time I attributed her interest to other causes. False modesty was not one of the failings of the youth who was John Holt.

We were now in a quieter and almost deserted street which took its steep and tortuous way up from the waterfront. On either side rose low houses, with bare white faces and little ornamental second-story balconies after the Spanish fashion. Now and then, through an open doorway, you could glimpse a dark interior, and beyond, a patio, cool and inviting of aspect. The narrowness of the pavement, blessed be the man who laid it so, necessitated my pressing close to my companion whenever we encountered a pedestrian going in the opposite direction. Each light contact did unspeakable things to my heart. And on one occasion my hand brushed hers. From then on I walked in roseate lunacy.

She could not have been unaware of my delighted agitation. Yet where a lesser woman might have shown some hint of triumph, or affected scorn—she walked a goddess, gracious and serene. And if the shepherd whom she deigned to charm should offer up

his heart in both his hands, wherefore should she know triumph or offence?

Lift up your old gray poll, John Holt, and sing. And thank the Lord on your two narrow bones, that you once gathered long and long ago a store of dreams to gild the faded years.

Chapter VI

THE FATE OF NATIONS

It was some hours later that I left the counting house of Messrs. Frazer, Trenholm & Co., Charleston and Liverpool, accredited financial agents to the Confederate States of America. My pockets bulged with manifests and bills of lading, but my thoughts were quite otherwise engaged than with bales, boxes and barrels, pounds, shillings and pence. If I need particularize as to the channels in which flowed my reveries I have made a very poor fist indeed at my self-appointed task of acquainting you with the life and opinions of John Holt—and I might as well give over.

My unfamiliarity with St. George's and a certain inattention as to the direction in which I was going conspired to lead me by a route not the most direct, to where the *Venture's* boat would pick me up. I had halted to take my bearings afresh when my eye was attracted by a note of color a short distance down the street. It was a flag, showing the stars and stripes and flying from a short pole, set at an angle of forty-five degrees over the doorway of a house. However it was not the flag which held my attention, but the sight of a familiar figure standing on the doorstep of the

house. The figure was that of Mr. Lamar, our first officer, and he was engaged in a one-sided conversation with a man who stood bareheaded in the doorway. I was near enough to get a good look at the stranger. Tall he was, with the long visage and the bony frame of an old horse, and draped rather than clad in a frock coat of rusty black, which gave him somewhat the aspect of a non-conformist clergyman. He was punctuating his utterances with sudden darts of a long forefinger, which he employed much as a fencer uses his foil, now threatening Mr. Lamar's face and now feinting at his waistcoat. Whether from fear of the lethal forefinger or wearied by the length of the speaker's periods, the first officer exhibited every sign of impatience and a desire to depart. The restlessness of his audience, however, appeared no whit to embarrass the exhorter. His jaw, adorned with what the Americans call a "goatee," wagged with unabated vigor.

Thinking to release my shipmate from his unpleasant situation, I was bearing down to the rescue when he extricated himself very effectively.

Mr. Lamar did not speak above an ordinary conversational tone, but as he let the words fall, one by one, as if he wanted them to sink in, there was a deadly iciness about them that made me shiver:

"And-you-sir-may-go-to-hell."

Over the first officer's shoulder I caught a glimpse of the other's face. It was a study. Anger, amazement, chagrin, a baker's dozen of conflicting emotions

seemed to struggle for supremacy. Before he could recover from his astonishment, Mr. Lamar had turned on his heel and was walking rapidly away. For a moment the gaunt man stood looking after the retreating back of his visitor. Then with a gesture of his hand, which might have conveyed anything, he withdrew inside, vindicating his dignity by slamming the door with a violence which woke the echoes in the silent street and threatened injury to the plaster of his dwelling.

On the portal, thus unceremoniously closed, was a polished brass plate which proclaimed to the world in general:

"Consulate of the United States of America."

And beneath ran a smaller legend: "Caleb Coffin."

Knowing Mr. Lamar as I did, I felt sure that he would not be best pleased to know that I had been a witness to the recent scene. Thus I determined not only to say nothing about it, but not even to overhaul him. But as I loafed along I could not prevent my curiosity working. What possible business could the United States Consul have with an officer of a blockade runner? And why should a man of Mr. Lamar's correct bearing employ vigorous language in the public street? The provocation, I felt sure, must have been extreme.

At the hopeless nature of these problems I shook my head, and whether by this slight movement, or otherwise, my thoughts flowed back into those channels which I again refuse to name.

At the dock I found Mr. Lamar, awaiting the boat from the *Venture*. So far as I could judge he had recovered completely his equanimity, and so I made bold to prosecute the inquiry with which I had been entrusted.

"Mr. Lamar," I asked, "did you ever hear of any man connected with the *Venture* by the name of Quintard?"

Before replying he pulled out his cigar case and courteously extended it in my direction. Somewhat to my surprise I noted that his hand was not entirely steady. His interview with Mr. Caleb Coffin *had* shaken him then. Not until we were both puffing one of his slender cheroots did he break silence.

"What name did you say?"

"Quintard. Some one was asking me this morning if a Mr. Quintard had ever been aboard the *Venture* as first officer."

"That someone was a lady, not old and not ugly?"

"Er-yes." I stammered and no doubt flushed. "But how did you know?"

He smiled. "Forgive me, Mr. Holt. But when a young man betrays such marked eagerness in prosecuting inquiries on behalf of a stranger—it would not require the skill of Edgar Allan Poe's Monsieur Dupin to deduce that this stranger was neither masculine nor ill-favored. But to answer your question—I don't believe anyone going by the name of Quintard was ever signed on in any capacity."

So that was that. But for all Mr. Lamar's disclaimer

of especial cleverness in guessing the sex and attractions of the person who sought information concerning Mr. Quintard, I was surprised at the first officer's discernment. I had thought my manner, as I had asked the question, casual in the extreme.

That afternoon while I was closeted with Captain Merrihew going over some matters of ship's business, Girond announced Mr. Ravenel, resident manager of Messrs. Frazer, Trenholm & Co. Close on the heels of the announcement appeared Mr. Ravenel in the flesh. And quite a tidy bit of flesh it was too, very pink and slightly out of breath.

"And so this is Captain Merry," he exclaimed, offering the hand of a large and healthy infant. "Most happy to make your acquaintance, sir, most happy. Our Liverpool office has written of you in terms of the highest commendation, sir, the very highest."

Captain Merrihew acknowledged the kindness of "our Liverpool office" and hastened to say that he had been promising himself the pleasure of calling on Mr. Ravenel within the hour.

"So our young friend here told me." Mr. Ravenel chuckled. "And so I thought I'd steal a march on you and get in the first visit." Producing a large white handkerchief he proceeded to polish a gently simmering face and neck, all the while beaming with the utmost good humor and bubbling like a teakettle. As he sat there he resembled nothing so much as a little white elephant. Garments of white linen, rayed and creased in a thousand wrinkles upon his rotund per-

son, bore a striking resemblance to the skin of a pachyderm; while small blue eyes made smaller by the encroachment of his round pink cheeks, and the white moustache of his imperial, which stood out on either side like tiny tusks, completed the illusion.

"And now, Mr. Ravenel," said Captain Merrihew, "that we have cast our mudhook in the pleasant waters of St. George's, the next question which naturally arises is, when we shall pull it up? I won't conceal the fact, sir, that I'm impatient to have a go at a bit of hare and hounds with our Yankee friends."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, sir. Very glad. Very glad indeed, sir." Mr. Ravenel had a harmless little failing, ascribed in the Bible to the heathen. He was addicted to "vain repetition."

"But I'm afraid, sir," continued the manager, "it will be a week or ten days before we can wish you *bon voyage*. We are expecting a consignment of Austrian rifles, which will be part of your cargo. And I may say, sir, that you will find them as welcome in Charleston as the season's first sprig of mint in a Kentucky garden."

For the life of me I could not catch the allusion. But that it was humorous in the extreme was manifest. Mr. Ravenel progressed through all the successive stages by which men of generous proportions express extremes of mirth. First there was the faintest suspicion of a chuckle, then a whole procession of chuckles treading on each other's heels and tumbling incontinently forth higgledy piggledy like school boys re-

leased for an unexpected holiday. Then came the fit of coughing that must inevitably result in apoplexy were it not for the restorative thumps which the victim deals himself on the chest. So infectious was Mr. Ravenel's merriment that long before he had administered the last curative thump, both Captain Merrihew and myself were roaring with laughter.

"But I trust, gentlemen, that you will not find time hanging heavily on your hands. You will always find my latch string hanging on the outside and if you don't give it a pull early and often I shall be hurt, gentlemen—" Mr. Ravenel attested to the degree of injury he would sustain by a series of oaths which I shall not set down. In cold print they would be shocking and present a very unfair picture of our guest. Uttered in his peculiarly soft and pleasing voice, the words lost their usually harsh and offensive sound and became graceful ornaments of speech like the "faith" and "marry" and kindred mild oaths of our fathers. "They can swear like fiends—and do—in the pleasantest voices in the world," Mr. Lamar had said anent the Charlestonians. If Mr. Ravenel was a fair example, I was prepared to agree with the first officer.

"I have a couple of horses in my stable, gentlemen, eating their heads off. I'd consider it a favor if you would ride a little of the lard off their lazy bones. A favor, nothing less. You won't find anything on the islands that will pass those horses on the road or lead them over a jump. And they've got every gait a horse ever had—walk, fox trot, single foot, pace, lope or

gallop—" He stopped and his face assumed an expression of ludicrous dismay. "—— ——— my old fool soul. Here I am talking to you about gaited horses. And there you sit thinking: 'What does he take us for? Highty, tighty young ladies that are afraid a good bone-shaking trot will bring down their back hair?' Well, I reckon there's one thing an Englishman and an American never agreed on yet—the right way to train a piece of horse flesh. You ride to get exercise and we ride to dodge it. But you'll find them good horses, even if they are a little easy-gaited."

"And now, Captain Merry," Mr. Ravenel continued, "my first duty must be to find you a capable pilot. And that's a job that will call for some beating of the bushes. Good pilots are getting scarce. They are mostly Southerners and when the Yanks catch them, it's prison and no exchange. They hope to cripple the trade that way."

"Fortunately the *Venture* is already well supplied as far as a pilot goes," Captain Merrihew said. "Our first officer is thoroughly familiar with the coast of the Carolinas. I took him on for that very reason."

"Good, sir, very good," Mr. Ravenel beamed his satisfaction. "You have perfect confidence in your first officer's ability, of course?"

"The utmost, sir. He is an excellent seaman. I have never seen a better. Furthermore he came highly recommended by persons in London very close to your government."

The question of the pilot settled, Mr. Ravenel next,

with the aid of chart, proceeded to inform Captain Merrihew of the state of the blockade.

"According to last advices, sir, the blockading squadron is made up of a dozen or so cruisers which pretty well cover the approaches to Charleston. On land the Yankees have batteries here on James Island and Folly Island. We hold Fort Sumter, right here in the middle of the harbor, and further out we have Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island and batteries on Cummings Point, so that we command both sides of the harbor mouth. The only trick is to get around or through the blockading fleet during the night. Once under cover of our guns you are safe as a rabbit in a briar patch.

"But there's another danger you have to look out for. There's a Yankee cruiser, the *Seneca*, standing off and on St. George's on the lookout for runners."

"What," exclaimed Captain Merrihew, "standing off and on a British port to seize a British ship? By God, that's coming it a bit thick. Blockading the Southern ports is one thing, but blockading the ports of a neutral power is another. And you mean to say they would—"

"No, sir!" Mr. Ravenel's voice trembled with poorly suppressed fury. "I *don't* mean to say they *would*. They did! Not two weeks ago the *Seneca* took the steamer *Jennie Watson* less than three miles off the Bermuda coast—not three miles, sir, as I'm a living breathing sinner."

"And there were British warships in the harbor?"

Captain Merrihew was hardly less indignant than the Southerner. "What was the governor thinking of? He could have blown the *Seneca* out of the water and been within his rights."

In the Captain's eyes was that far off look I had seen before, and he sat drumming his fingers on the cabin table and humming beneath his breath. I saw his lips forming almost soundlessly the words:

"For quarter, for quarter, the pirates they did cry,
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we,
But the quarter that we gave them was to sink them
in the sea,
Sailing down along the shores of the High Barba-
ree."

He arose and took a couple of short turns across the cabin. When he faced us again he was smiling and the far off look was gone from his eyes. But there was a light there—such a light, I thought, as a bayonet or a sword makes when it catches the sun.

"Mr. Ravenel,"—his voice was low and eager—"do you suppose the governor would lend me half-a-dozen guns and gun crews to serve them?"

"You mean—" Mr. Ravenel's little eyes widened.

"Just that, sir. To attempt the capture of a British merchantman off a British port is either an act of war or an act of piracy. If I'm wrong about that I'm willing to take the consequences if it lands me in the dock with a charge of piracy hanging around my own

neck. Help me get the guns and we'll put it to the test."

He clapped me on the shoulder with a force that almost toppled me from my chair.

"What do you say to that, Young Holt? Trial by battle, eh, 'and God defend the right?' A dash for the open and a shot between wind and water for the fellow who tries to bar our way. Bloody pirates or upholders of England's honor on the seas—according to the way the lawyers look at it. Charleston or Davy Jones. And old Francie Drake leaning down from heaven's high ramparts and envying us the sport."

I didn't say anything to that. I couldn't. The moment was too much for me. I had a wild impulse to raise a "hip, hip, hooray" or a "yoicks." I think I must have given vent to a yelp like an excited fox-terrier.

Mr. Ravenel had risen from his chair and was trotting about the cabin swearing joyously. He was no longer a kindly, somewhat futile old fellow, needlessly echoing his own words. Years seemed to have dropped from his shoulders and his speech had suddenly become direct, incisive. He was like a man reacting to the stimulus of some powerful drug, which sharpens his every faculty.

"It would mean war. By the clear blue flames of hell it would. England lined up with the Confederate States of America. Britain's fleet menacing New York and her troops pouring over the Canadian bor-

der. And maybe Louis Napoleon coming in too and sending an army up by way of Mexico. Burn me, body, soul and breeches. It would mean victory in a month."

"Captain Merry, if you sail armed, old Harry Ravenel will sail to hell or glory by your side. We'll fire a broadside that'll be heard in Richmond and Washington and reverberate through every capital in Europe. Standing on the bridge of the *Venture* we'll make history, sir, history. It'll be an admiral's epaulets for you or a tomb in Westminster. As for me—let me hear the gun that sends the first shot into the *Seneca*, and I could die happy."

He gripped Captain Merrihew's hand, and there were tears in his eyes. "Damme, sir, damme, sir, oh, damme." The little man subsided into his chair an inarticulate heap of pink flesh and profanity. For a space he sat mopping his brow and struggling for breath.

"With your permission, sir." The Confederate agent turned the key in the lock of the cabin door and returned to his seat. "Now let's figure this thing out calmly, sir. The governor's not going to give you the guns without you raise a big to-do. First and last he's a politician and mighty mindful of his own hide. But by the Lord, you must push him, sir, push him."

The little man for all his resolution to figure it out calmly was on his feet, tramping the narrow confines of the cabin.

"I won't hide the facts from you, Captain Merry. We must have help or we'll go under. The South's fighting with her back to the wall. She's robbed the cradle and the grave to fill her ranks. She's down to the last ham in the smoke-house and the scrapings of the mealbin. She's fought a good fight and she'll keep on fighting. But there can't be but one end unless—

"Captain Merry, if I thought you were the sort of man that money would tempt, I'd fill this cabin knee deep with gold-pieces. I could do it too. If our Treasury didn't have the money, our women would strip the wedding rings from their fingers to raise it. However I won't insult you, sir, by the offer of money. But if you sail from this port armed, I'll go down on my knees and kiss the ground you walk on as if you were Christ himself."

The little round robin of a man, whose quaintness of speech and weird profanity had tempted me to mirth, had all at once assumed the august proportions of a tragic figure. In him I saw the embodiment of a nation over which fate was already drawing a dark and bloody veil. To the generous heart of youth there is always an irresistible appeal in a losing cause or a forlorn hope. For the first time my sympathies were actively joined with my thirst for adventure. The *Venture* was no longer merely a blockade runner fitted out for profit. She was a crusader's ship consecrated to a glorious mission.

For the next hour Captain Merrihew and Mr. Rav-

enel were bent over a table littered with maps. In that hour the flags of England and France were raised side by side with the victorious stars and bars over New York, Boston and Washington. The British fleet had swept the Federal squadrons from the seas and the Northern Armies were being crushed between an Allied British and French force advancing from the north and east to meet the armies of Lee and Johnston marching up from the south.

I have often reflected on what might have been the consequences of that conference in Captain Merrihew's cabin. Is it impossible that so humble an agent as our little *Venture* might not have involved two great powers on the side of the Confederacy? Things less probable have happened. The destinies of nations have been swayed and the course of history has been changed by events more trivial than the exchange of shots between two ships. Certainly Captain Merrihew would have asked nothing better than an opportunity to abandon the furtive rôle of blockade runner for a more stirring part.

And even yet, I am far from convinced that the governor would have been severely censured had he allowed the *Venture* to sail with a defensive armament. The Confederacy had powerful friends in England, and would John Bull have been averse to seeing his rival in the west a house divided? Louis Napoleon was already casting covetous glances in the direction of Mexico. And a defeated North would never venture

to protest against the presence of French bayonets south of the Rio Grande in support of the Emperor Maximilian.

I wonder by how little the dreams of those two men—the ardent lover of his country and the ardent lover of adventure—failed of a stupendous reality. To me, looking on in silent wonder, as these two moved armies and dictated terms to a conquered enemy, for all the world like emperors, the victory seemed already won.

Captain Merrihew was to call on the governor at once to demand as a British subject the means of protecting himself against unwarranted aggression on the high seas. Mr. Ravenel was to arrange for the meeting at a ball to be given at the Government House that very evening. Knowing Captain Merrihew's forceful personality, and fired with enthusiasm as I was, I could not conceive of the failure of his mission.

Before Mr. Ravenel took his departure there was enacted a little scene vastly impressive. Captain Merrihew had requisitioned a very special bottle and Girond had filled our glasses. The captain rose and we grouped ourselves about him.

"Gentlemen, the Southern Confederacy."

With a single motion of his arm, so it seemed, he raised the full glass to his lips and tossed it empty over his shoulder. With less grace we followed his example.

"And now, gentlemen," said Mr. Ravenel, "with your permission I will propose a toast. Let it be the

good old toast of the blockade runner. And God grant that this is the last time we will ever drink it. Let us hope before long our supplies will be coming in under convoy of Her Majesty's Navy."

We raised our replenished glasses.

"To a dark night and a quick run—and blast the Yankee cruisers."

Chapter VII

I SEE A SHADOW

THE Governor's Ball may have been in reality the gorgeous affair I thought it. On the other hand my unsophisticated eyes and the broad strokes and the bright colors with which memory often spreads her canvas may have endowed this function with a brilliance far beyond its merits. But on the whole I prefer to give it the benefit of the doubt, and proclaim this particular ball a thing of splendor unsurpassed by any pageant since Harry the Eighth's Field of the Cloth of Gold.

Under the ægis of Mr. Ravenel, no longer a little white elephant but transformed by his evening dress into a sleek and well groomed black one, Captain Merrihew and I arrived at a fashionably late hour. As we paused in the doorway of the ballroom my eyes were dazzled by the glow of what seemed to be literally hundreds of tall wax candles blazing from the chandeliers and mirrored in the polished floor below. I cannot say that I *saw* her at that first glance. Rather I sensed her presence in the crowded room. Or perhaps the fervency of my hope that she would be there materialized her. However that may be, I knew she was there. As amid the bustle and busyness of the quay, I was con-

scious of her alone, so this rapidly shifting kaleidoscope of color was but a neutral background for her glory.

A dance had just ended and the dancers were quitting the floor. In their leisurely movement they gave the effect of a vast bed of many-hued flowers agitated by the ghost of a breeze. Violet, rose, white, lilac—only a painter could have named the shades and half-shades represented by the billowing silks and satins of the women. And everywhere bold splashes of poppy red and gleaming gold that were the officers from the garrison. Yet amid all this color and movement my eye, or my soul, sought and found her.

One moment the three of us were breasting the oncoming tide of dancers; the next, Mr. Ravenel was bending over her hand—the perfect squire of dames, taught in a school that had not yet forgotten the grand manner.

"My dear child," he was saying, "I declare every time I see you, you seem to have become more beautiful. Really you must stop it. So much charm in a young lady is as dangerous as—as dynamite."

She dropped him an old-fashioned curtsy. Down, down, with her crinoline billowing about her and her graceful body poised above it. Her head saucily a tilt, she looked up at him with a smile, half fond, half mocking and wholly delighted at his sincere tribute.

By right of auld acquaintance the old beau patted her hand and drew it through his arm. "Let me introduce my friends, Captain Merry and Mr. Holt of the British steamer *Venture*. Won't you welcome these voyagers

to our good town of St. George's? This, gentlemen, is our fairy princess of the Bermudas, who insists that she is a mere mortal. And while we all know better, we also know better than to disregard her royal behests. So to her face we are careful to address her as Miss Tempest."

"If my welcome can add anything to Mr. Ravenel's own, I do bid you welcome most heartily," she said. And by all the gods, no princess of the blood could have bettered the sweet graciousness of this regal young woman.

I did not catch Captain Merrihew's reply, but I fear it was something of traditional sailor hardihood. Certainly the color in Miss Tempest's cheeks deepened just a thought—and not from anger, to judge by her smile and the quick lift of her far seeing eyes. Goddesses, it would seem, can do with a bit of assurance from a handsome fellow. Mr. Ravenel bubbled over with a hearty chuckle. As for me, I said nothing at all, bowing my acknowledgement of the introduction and, I am sure, wearing my heart on my sleeve. Or rather March's sleeve, for I was abroad that evening in borrowed plumage.

"Mr. Holt and I have met before. And I think he has some news for me. If he should care to ask me for a dance he might have an opportunity of delivering his message."

If I should care! I bowed again and mumbled some inanity. If the Prime Minister should invite me to become a peer of the realm or if St. Peter should pre-

sent me with the freedom of New Jerusalem I should, no doubt, mumble "charmed, I'm sure," and then go out and kick myself for a tongue-tied ass. Even a lifetime in the law courts has not given me "to speak it trippingly on the tongue."

"Mr. Ravenel, I think you know Mr. Carruthers? Captain Merry and Mr. Holt—Mr. Carruthers."

Her escort, a young gentleman wearing one of those supercilious noses you see on guardsmen, and the red jacket of the Royal Artillery, bowed frigidly. "Bounder!" I thought, "with your you-be-damned-for-a-fellow air. I'd like to dangle Captain Merrihew's Crimean medals under your beak." I probably wronged Mr. Carruthers grossly. His infernally tall collar may have had a deal to do with his high-chinned carriage. But you will perceive that jealousy was at work. Thus quickly does the shepherd boy to whom the goddess deigns to stoop, assume proprietary prerogatives.

She sailed away with a bright and friendly glance over her shoulder that set my breast swelling like the gorget of a cock pheasant, left Mr. Ravenel's kindly old face wreathed in proudly paternal smiles, and brought a "marvelous, by Jove" from Captain Merrihew. And she was no true woman if the white hand resting thistle light on the red sleeve of the Royal Artillery, did not give a reassuring little pressure of intimacy that brought hope and comfort to that branch of the service.

"Holt," Captain Merrihew said, "I begin to suspect you are a deep young rascal. Here you have been in

St. George's less than twenty-four hours and you contrive not only to meet its sovereign princess but to receive signal favors at her hand."

And Mr. Ravenel, with I believe a minor note of kindly warning beneath his raillery: "You are venturing on perilous waters, young sir, perilous waters where an older and more experienced pilot might well find himself on a lee shore. God never made a kinder, more generous heart than Miss Tempest's. Never, sir. But it's her very kindness that makes her dangerous. Like the sun, she seems to smile on each of us for himself alone, when, truth to tell, she's smiling on the whole world. Gentlemen, will you join me in a glass to the beauty of our dangerous dear lady?"

Thus forewarned I went to the fate which I had neither the strength nor the wish to avoid.

"Shall we dance or would you prefer the cool of the Governor's delightful garden to the warmth of his ballroom?" she asked. "I warn you that in voting for the garden you run the risk of falling under the displeasure of the Governor's lady, who is my official dragon for the evening. However by now she is safely at whist with her fellow dragons, and if you are greatly daring—"

"I think I will vote for the garden if you don't mind," I said. "We may escape the vigilance of the lady, but if I should venture on the floor with you I would not escape the notice of the Royal Artillery. And there was that in his eye when I saw it last that spoke of coffee and pistols."

"Or even field pieces at twenty paces," she amended. "I cannot have your blood on my head. My hair is red enough already."

And so I, a lowly mortal, ventured into an enchanted garden with a fairy princess. And so I, a yokel shepherd, stepped into Elysium with a young goddess. And so I, a very innocent Adam, set foot in Eden with an Eve who must have been a tamer of men since the day she put aside her dolls. What chance had I against this weaver of charms, this spell caster, and she on her native heath, with the moon and a tropic night, as her allies, to bind me hand and foot and deliver me into her power?

By her side I followed paths of crushed shell, white as snow or moonlight, that wound mysteriously through an orderly jungle of shrub and tree, which breathed heady fragrances. Exalted I was and not a little fearful.

"And what news have you for me?" she asked.

"Very little, I'm afraid," I answered, and then lost myself in admiration of the curl that seemed to be reaching down to caress a bare and rounded shoulder. The curl, giving the faintest twitch of impatience, recalled my errant wits. "I'm terribly sorry," I hurried on, "but Mr. Lamar was sure that no Mr. Quintard was ever on the *Venture*."

"It was good of you to inquire."

"I will make a round of the shipping offices tomorrow," I continued. "And I will ask Mr. Ravenel. Perhaps I may be able to—"

"Pray, don't," she broke in. "You might find him." At my look of astonishment she laughed gaily. "I don't want him. He is one of those dreadful creatures—a friend of the family. He thoroughly disapproves of me and all my works. His favorite text is the deplorable lack of decorum exhibited by the modern young woman—meaning me. He's really much more difficult than Miranda. But I promised Aunt Sarah that I would go down to the docks to meet him, if he should arrive by the *Venture*. I have done my duty and now let's talk of something more interesting."

"Oh," I said, "I had pictured him quite differently." My reward for this involuntary self-revelation was a delicious ripple of laughter.

In the sharp black shadow cast by a thick-set hedge was a bench. And as Nature abhors a vacuum, so, when a man and a maid are strolling in a garden, does the Great Mother detest an unoccupied bench. The result was inevitable. In the mysterious alchemy of sex there is a quintessence which some women, devoid of any extraordinary beauty or wit, seem to exhale to the immediate enslavement of every man who strays within its influence. Even without her dazzling splendor, I verily believe this girl would have made a man of dour old St. Anthony himself. And that without the flutter of an eyelid in conscious coquetry. *Dia gynai-kon*—goddess-like among women.

Had I been a young Italian or Frenchman or Spaniard, had I belonged to any of the agile, fluent peoples—I had declared my passion then and there. But I

was a rough cub of a bearish Northern race, and I worshipped after the uncouth manner of my kind.

Not daring to speak of her and her beauty, I spoke at length of myself. From a throat arid as the desert, with my blood a tumultuous sea in my ears, I sang the saga of myself in a husky nervous whisper. I pelted her with formless chunks of my brief and uneventful biography, and bridged with shaky, mirthless laughter the terrifying pauses which yawned like bottomless abysses beneath me.

But if she were woman—and was she not very woman of very woman—she translated my witless vaporings into the song of my desire. She read into my tales of student rags and riots my ache to crush her in my arms and do violence to the untroubled curves of her lips. In my epics of river and football field she must have known that I spoke not of winded oarsmen but breathless lovers; not of the struggles of muddy sweat-streaked youths toward a distant goal, but of strainings no less fierce for paradise. In my admiration of the wild exploits of Mad Worthington, in my worship before the shrine of the man who had done things in the Crimea, she did not fail to breathe the savor of incense burned upon her altar.

At my mention of Captain Merrihew she betrayed a quickened interest. "Tell me about your *beau sabreur*," she said.

"Oh, you will like him immensely. Everyone does, I think. And if you were a man you would admire him no end. He would win you as he has won me. He's

a born leader." I plagiarized, without shame, Mr. Lamar's encomium on Captain Merrihew. Led on by her sympathetic interest in the most romantic personage I had ever met, I momentarily forgot even her own intoxicating nearness, and talked without self-consciousness. As an elder disciple of a cult might instruct a novice I endeavored to make her see Captain Merrihew as I saw him.

It was a gentle pressure of a cool hand on mine that dammed the flow of my eloquence. It was as if she had said: "Hush, listen." I strained my ears and sought to read the meaning in the eyes that were but two deep pools of shadow. I heard nothing but the subdued strains of the military band whose martial blare was muted to the gentler harmonies of the dance. Nothing but that, unless it were the fluting of a bird in some leafy fastness near at hand.

"Forgive me." She smiled her apologies. "I interrupted you. But I'm afraid I have mislaid my fan. It belongs to Aunt Sarah and happens to be the immediate jewel of her soul."

I sprang up, all eagerness in her service. "If you could think where it might possibly be—"

"Oh, would you?" Only a very valuable fan indeed, could have justified the gratitude in her tone. "It must be either"—she enumerated several possibilities.

But the fan was not to be located. Hurrying to report the failure of my mission, I stopped short as I turned the corner of the winding path. Was there behind the bench on which she sat a shadow which

moved, and even as I looked was swallowed up in the other shadows of the garden? And was it the lazy sea wind alone that set those leaves to clashing softly? It may have been.

"I looked everywhere you suggested," I began, "but I found not a feather of it." The fan was of ostrich plumes, she had told me.

"Oh, I am so sorry to have caused you all that bother. And now we must go in. Really we have been out here for ages." What delicate flattery of regret implied. She rose. My eye caught a gleam of white against the dark turf. I stopped and retrieved an object of feathery softness.

"How stupid of me," she exclaimed. "Scold me as I deserve."

But it is not for a shepherd boy to berate a goddess. So my eyes must have told her, and for my magnanimity I was rewarded with a very pretty display of dimples. Yet as we slowly retraced our steps to the house the shadow which I had seen in play behind the bench seemed to have left some trace of itself in her face. It was a sweetly grave young woman whom I bowed away on the arm of a flushed and anxious partner who had been "beating the coverts for her this twenty minutes, by Jove, he had." Several times thereafter I caught sight of her among the crush of dancers. Once with Captain Merrihew. And she was radiant. But was any woman ever in his company and not at her best?

It was not in Mr. Ravenel's nature to allow a young

man, come to a ball under his fatherly wing, to lack for partners. But I doubt that I contributed greatly to their enjoyment of the evening. The man newly descended from sentimental commerce with divinity, is scarcely responsive to mortal charmers. Then, too, I had this to think of. I had seen a hint of sorrow or trouble ruffle the serene brow of the unapproachable object of my idolatry. It needed but this humanizing touch to give me courage to raise my eyes in love as well as worship. Her vulnerability had made her more the woman. Might I not hope as well as pray? And above all, how could I serve her?

On our way back to the ship Captain Merrihew confided to me that his interview with the governor had been a failure.

"The old cock squatted in the gorse and wouldn't be flushed," he said. "He made a great palaver about friendly relations, neutrality and all manner of rubbish. Not a gun would he give or a bag of powder. We had his profound sympathy but his hands were tied. He would make representations to Lord Russell. But as for taking a step, on his own responsibility, that could not fail to result in serious international consequences—oh, my dear sir, really—

"Ah, Francie Drake, that old England of yours has fallen on evil days, when her ships must skulk from English ports by night and dare not answer her enemies shot for shot."

So the Southern Confederacy was not to gain victory by a British alliance. I could imagine Mr. Ravenel

in a state between tears and apoplexy. I was profoundly sorry for the little man. But—

A nation might drown in a sea of blood and it would move me less than a shadow of trouble on a woman's brow. A sixpence held close enough to the eye will eclipse the moon.

Chapter VIII

THE GREAT GIROND

A WEEK, a fortnight, went by. The Austrian rifles had not arrived. The *Venture* tugged lazily at her anchor, lying fathoms deep on the sea floor, yet plainly visible through water hardly more opaque than air. Mr. Ravenel trotted about his office or up and down the *Venture's* deck, damning his eyes and the Austrians with wonderful impartiality. The crew looked upon the wine of the country when it was red (not to mention the rum of Jamaica and the gin of Holland) and the girls of the port when they were kind. Such of the officers of the *Venture* as were socially inclined did not lack for entertainment; for through the kindness of Mr. Ravenel many were the hospitable doors opened to us.

Eager as I had been for "a dark night and a quick run" with a chance of confounding the Yankee cruisers or by them being confounded, I yet found reason to be glad of our delayed departure. And when a young man is deaf to the call of Adventure it can only mean that her voice is drowned out by the rustle of a petticoat. Captain Merrihew, likewise, appeared satisfied to await the course of events. If the delay irked him

it was not apparent. A yachtsman on a pleasure cruise could not have entered more lightheartedly into the gaieties offered by the open-handed town of St. George's. He was much ashore, leaving the *Venture* in charge of the first officer, who, alone of all our ship's company, expressed any vexation at our forced inactivity. Once on a dark night I came upon him on deck, leaning on the bulwarks, and gazing to the westward as though he sought to discern the lights of beleagured Charleston across the tossing leagues of ocean.

"What a night for a run. And here we lie—no nearer our goal than if we were moored off London Bridge." He drew his hand wearily across his brow and sighed.

"But I must say," I replied, "I find St. George's a devilish fine place to be tied up in."

He looked at me. Under the light of a ship's lantern his face showed more haggard and deeply lined than ever. "I suppose you do. But in my case it's different, you see."

I *did* see. To me, in spite of my newly awakened sympathies for the Southern Confederacy, the whole thing was a tremendous lark. To him it was an important move in a grim game, on which was staked the success or failure of a Cause. Mr. MacAlpin, coming over the side, interrupted our further pursuit of the subject.

The chief engineer, when not yearning over his

engines, spent much of his leisure in the tap room of the principal hotel of St. George's—a place much frequented by the skippers, mates and engineers of blockade runners. "Mony a bit o' gossip an' unco' strange things I hear between one sup o' whusky an' anither. An' if a body is gude at puttin' two an' two together he may pick up a leeberal education at that same univairsity," Mr. MacAlpin once had told me.

"Do ye ken the American consul here?" Mr. MacAlpin said—"a long-liggit loon named Coffin?"

"No," said Mr. Lamar somewhat to my surprise.

"Weel, 'tis no matter. But accordin' to the best authorities, this Coffin is a crafty diel wi' no great love for blockade runnin' bodies, an' he likes nothin' better than to put soot in their porridge. 'Twas him as was responsible for th' takin' of the *Jennie Watkins*. An' if he's no spreadin' a net for us this night 'twill be because it is already spread.

"But I have been doin' some thinkin' an' it may be the old rascal will be helpin' us instead o' hinderin'.

"But fairst I must tell you how the *Jennie Watkins* was taken. When the *Seneca* fairst came nosin' around these pairts her skipper sailed into the port o' St. George's bold as brass. But the governor put down his foot hard. 'Twenty-four hours I'll gie ye to coal,' he says, 'but after that out ye go. No belligerent warship has the right to use a neutral port as a base o' opairations.' "

Mr. Lamar nodded. "That's good international law."

"Then," Mr. MacAlpin resumed, "the *Seneca* took to lyin' off an' on and sendin' in a boat every day to pick up any news that old Coffin may have diggit up. The governor stopped that too as bein' a breach of neutrality. But that was a sma' thing to this Coffin lad. You'll have noticed that schooner lyin' in the harbor."—The chief engineer waved his hand toward a craft anchored some distance away—"She's the *Nancy Bradford* out of Salem an' her skipper an' old Coffin are thick as two thieves. When Coffin has anything to tell the *Seneca* yon Yankee sailorman relays the message."

"And what says the governor to that?" inquired Mr. Lamar.

"Oh, the *Nancy* does no rin up any flag signals. Trust their Yankee smartness for that. But if the skipper chooses to fly a pair of old breeks at his maist-head or hang oot his wash in the riggin', wha's to prevent him? Mayn't an' honest sailorman, so far fra home an' mother, do a day's washin' noo an' then? The day the *Jennie Watkins* sailed there was an unco' lot o' washin' done aboard the *Nancy Bradford*, an' a boat fra the *Seneca* was off an' on the entrance to the harbor a' the day.

"That night 'twas black as the inside of a tinker's pocket, but the *Seneca* was waitin' for the *Jennie* for all the world like a jo that knows to the minute when his lass will be a-coomin' down the dark lane. The light the *Nancy Bradford* ran to her maisthead

as the *Jennie Watkins* put to sea was no exactly to weesh the *Jennie* luck."

From his pocket Mr. MacAlpin produced a stubby pipe and with that meticulous care which he brought to bear upon all matters, great or trivial, proceeded to fill it. The lighting of the pipe was a no less painstaking and methodical procedure. First a finger must be moistened in the mouth and held aloft to detect the direction of an almost imperceptible breeze. The wind must be faced and the lighted match cupped in two protecting hands. Lastly by a slow turning of the head from side to side the flame was passed across and across the tobacco so that the entire surface was ignited. Once the pipe was fully alight, it did one's heart good to see the honest Scot savoring the smoke in gentle whiffs—sipping it as a connoisseur absorbs a good wine. His was none of your neurotic puffing, like that of a locomotive climbing a steep gradient. Rather he laved his spirit in the warmth and fragrance which the bright Virginia sun had kissed into the golden weed. Only such wholehearted and appreciative smokers should be permitted to burn tobacco, say I, and all true lovers of the leaf will agree with me. Parliament ought to pass a law to that effect or at least some one should write a letter to *The Times* agitating the suppression of irreverent smoking.

His pipe fairly alight, the engineer resumed. "I'm just back from veesitin' yon Yankee sailorman." He nodded in the direction of the *Nancy Bradford*, whose

bare poles and dark hull showed off our starboard quarter. "'Tis he that will help us outwit the old tod, Coffin."

"What," asked Mr. Lamar, "you expect a New England Yankee to help a blockade runner?"

"Oh, he'll no be knowin' that he's helpin'," said Mr. MacAlpin with great complacency. "Thae twa will be diggin' a pit an' fallin' into the midst o' it theirsels. With Captain Merry's pairmeesion I ha' been cultivatin' the acquaintance o' the *Nancy's* skipper wi' a view to a bit of strategy."

I had often observed the *Nancy's* skipper. A dry, leathery-faced old fellow who spent much time leaning on the rail staring in our direction. The frequency with which he spat violently into the sea I took as an expression of the depth of his contempt for us and our calling. I voiced my surprise at his receiving a visitor from the *Venture*.

"He was no sae friendly on my fairst veesit," Mr. MacAlpin admitted, "but I found the way to his hairt. Like maist intelligent men he is given to argument, especially in the realm o' metyphesics. An' as I am no avarise to the soobject mysel we got on famously after a bit. A decent, sensible man, I found him, an' sound in the doctrine except in one vairy important parteeccular. He's no sae firm on predestination.

"'Man,' I says to him, 'how can ye doot predestination in the world to coom when ye see evidence of it on every hand even in this world?'

"'Cite me the evidence,' he says.

"'Why are ye followin' the sea,' I says 'instead o' the plough or sellin' wooden nutmegs to the folk o' your native bailiwick?'"

"'I am followin' the sea,' he says, 'because my father and my father's father were whalemens out o' Salem time out o' mind. The sea's in my bluid. Why should I no be followin' it?'"

"'Ye should,' I says, 'because it was written before the beginnin' o' time that ye should. Ye were predestined to the sea an' ye could do naught else.'"

"'I was not predestined,' he says. 'I went o' my own free will because the sea was in my bluid. I could ha' stayed ashore.' An' oh he is a vairy stubborn chiel, yon Yankee sailorman."

"'An' had ye stayed ashore what would that hae proved except that ye were predestined to be a great fool an' to go contrairy to yer nature's self an' the promptin's o' yer ain heart a' the long years o' yer life?' I asks him."

"'But he wouldna have it so. Never have I seen a more stiffnecked man or one more prideful in his blindness. But I gied him an argument he'll no be like to answer sae soon. 'Man,' I says to him, 'a body that doesna' believe in predestination is a dom fool.' Then I came away, not wishful to gloat over the downfall o' my adversairy.'"

"'You believe, then, that from the cradle to the grave each man drees his weird and may not depart from the course mapped out for him before his birth?'" Mr. Lamar asked. "'What if a man does evil and brings

sorrow on himself and others? Is that, too, by divine decree?"

"Ye've asked me a question that I doot all the Kirk o' Scotland could answer. But I'll do my best," replied Mr. MacAlpin. "In the first place, 'tis not always that we puir humans can say this thing is good and that is ill. Before the noo there hae been blessings in disguise and men hae entertained angels unawares. But if a man does his prayerful best, 'tis comforting to think that the issue lies in God's hand, not his own weak, feeble one. If each one of us was the architect of his own destiny, 'twould be a fearsome responsibility, I'm thinking, an' most of us would be living in unco queer houses."

"Right or wrong, sir, yours is a comforting creed," said the first officer. "I only wish it were mine."

Mr. MacAlpin laid a kindly hand upon the other's sleeve. "And who knows but what it will be some day? When I was a young man I had no mair re-leegion than a potato bogle. The tavern saw me oftener than the kirk and a lassie's idle claver meant more to me then the dominie's sairmon. And mine was no sudden change of heart. 'Twas a gradual increeping o' conviction. The knowledge of God's love came over me like the slow deep flow o' the tide. Sae slow that no eye could mark its progress, sae strong that no hairt could resist its strength.

"The lang lone watches aboard ship set a man thinking, whether he will or no. Ye've found it so, Mr. Lamar? 'Tis the same whether your watch is

under the stars or by the light of a lantern in the engine room. And sitting day after day and night after night seeing naething but the play of the engines and hearing naething but their voices I'd lose myself in reveries. In the beginning my dreams would be of the lass I'd kissed good-bye or the one waiting to bid me welcome. An' in the voice of the steam I'd hear the bawdy songs men sing when the first bottle's gane an' the second is gaeing fast.

"But in time the orderly play of engines that never wearied, turned my thoughts to the orderly play of the univarse and the Great Inventor who planned it all and set it a-whirlin'. 'Twas no sudden change, as I've told ye. 'Twas gradual—gradual, but sure. 'Twas no deacon I'd become. I still had my fling ashore, but I had thoughts for ither things beside. An' now an' again the engines would fall into some old tune I'd known as a lad and I'd hear the words of the psalmist as I'd heard 'em a thousand times in the kirk. An' there were times when I'd put words o' my ain to the airs."

Mr. MacAlpin's pipe had gone out. With a disregard of orderliness which I am sure was not habitual to him, he neglected to knock out the ashes before stuffing it into his pocket.

"They that go down to the sea in ships and occupy
their business in great waters
These men see the works of the Laird and His
wonders in the deep.

In the watches of the night they behold the stars
and look on God's handiwork in the heavens.

And in the dark bowels of the ship, there also doth
the Almighty shew forth His power.

At His command the earth conceiveth through a
thousand generations and bringeth forth coal and
iron for the use of man.

He who hath ordained the winds and ordereth the
tides in their season giveth to steam the strength
of an hundred oxen, yea, a multitude of horses.

O, ye rods and wheels, O, ye valves and condensers,
O, ye pistons and gauges, ye also obey His laws
and make manifest His might."

To Mr. MacAlpin, no doubt, a skylark would have
been nothing but a foolish wee birdie, and a primrose
by the river's brim, not even a primrose. He would
not have known its name, belike. Primroses are not
common in the streets of Edinburgh or on the crested
seas. But I hold him a true poet for all of that. If
his poetry was inspired by the reek of train oil and
heated metal, it was the expression of an honest emo-
tion profoundly felt. His poetry was born of the deep
love he bore his engines. Can every poet, who utters
ecstatic couplets in praise of skylark or primrose, claim
the same unstudied affection for his source of inspira-
tion?

It was my duty that evening to keep an eye on things,
and save for a man on watch in the bows I had the
deck to myself. Mr. Lamar had withdrawn to his
cabin and the engineer, I doubt not, was below brood-
ing over the slumbers of his beloved children and

anointing with oil their giant limbs of glistening steel against the time when their speed should stand between us all and disaster. For a time I paced the constricted length of the bridge, thinking of many things. The peaceful pleasant days I had left behind at Balliol, the disturbing loveliness of one goddess-like among women, the great adventure that I hoped lay beyond the westward horizon. The bridge had ceased to be a thing of boards laid down by men. It was the rainbow's arc, which I had but to follow to its end to find fulfilment of my fondest dreams. And as I walked in high detachment thus, up from the earth, ten thousand leagues below, there stole a fragrance fit to tempt the gods.

I stopped and sniffed. It was coffee. And by its rich aroma I was prepared to swear that Girond presided over the coffee pot. On occasion this admirable little man would wave the cook contemptuously aside and himself distil a beverage that was no longer coffee but a strong clear liquor, fragrant as old wine and as strong and revivifying as a brisk sea breeze. Down the ladder I slid and hurried along the deck to where the light from the open door of the galley cut a gash in the darkness, only to stop dead in my tracks with amazement.

In the doorway, his back to me, stood Girond with folded arms, and over his shoulder I caught sight of the cook's face, a tallow-colored moon, expressive of utter terror. The big man had withdrawn to the further end of his little galley where he had flattened

himself, so far as his vast bulk would permit, against the wall. Like an elephant terrified by a mouse, the cook stood glaring at the little steward.

"Unclean beast," said Girond speaking very slowly and precisely, "shall I pin wan of your beeg ears to the wall or wan of your gross and most dishonest and thieving 'ands?" The cook's hands, which were spread like two starfish against the wall, jerked convulsively.

"Sacr  cochon d'un cochon, so much as wink the eye and I will make a pat  of your liver for the leetle feeshes. Stand steel, imbecile goose."

Puzzled and curious I waited, an unseen witness to what followed. His eyes still fixed intently upon the cook, Girond's left hand dived into the pocket of his jacket and an instant afterward emerged holding between index and middle finger a scrap of white paper. Against the lighted doorway of the galley the hand was perfectly visible from where I stood. Fascinated by the play of fingers so rapid and deft that each seemed endowed with an independent intelligence of its own, I watched the paper curl itself into a half cylinder, scoop something up from the palm of the hand, roll rapidly from side to side and take form as a cigarette. Without haste Girond moistened the edge, lit his cigarette and tossed the match at the feet of his victim, who had not moved a muscle. I wondered if Girond had actually mesmerized the man.

"Speak, unmentionable garbage. Shall it be the ear or the 'and?"

The cook opened his mouth and his great jowls quivered, but no words came. The drops of perspiration on his brow gathered weight and rolled down his face.

"M'sieu the Capitaine ees an imbecile, you would say? Or ees eet a nigger driver, you would call him? Speak, Judas."

Again the cook opened his mouth, only to gasp like a dying fish.

"Hah!" Girond's sudden exclamation made me jump. A stamp of the foot. The rise and fall of an arm almost too quick for the eye to follow. A shriek from the cook, not loud but exceeding dismal. A streak of light as some object went hurtling through the air. A thud. A corner of cookie's apron leaped back against the wall and clung there impaled by a wicked looking butcher knife.

Even as I advanced on the run, Girond was balancing a cleaver. I caught his upraised arm. "Drop it, Girond." The forearm I held was hardly bigger than a child's, but it was hard and tense as a wire cable. If it had come to a struggle I am not sure which of us would have come out on top. But the Frenchman offered no resistance. He let the cleaver fall with a clang on the deck, and turned on me his mournful dark eyes.

"Monsieur cam' too queek," he said, removing his cigarette and caressing his fierce mustachio. "I, myself, Girond would 'ave teach this camel the manners."

It was then I noticed his belt was bristling with a peculiarly murderous assortment of cutlery.

From the tail of my eye I saw the cook furtively disengaging two knives which pinned his apron to the wall and which had passed in rather uncomfortable proximity to his bulging calves. All the while he kept his gaze fixed on his enemy.

"If there are any manners to be taught," I said, "Captain Merry is the man to teach them, not you."

"Ah, but," Girond's cigarette described an explanatory arc leaving a meteor's trail of smoke in the still air, "monsieur does not comprehend all. Thees is a vairy eespecial case. M'sieur the Capitaine could not deign to notice the vile words of thees assassin. Eet would not be dignity. Thus, I, Girond, myself, as serviteur and frand loyale—" The eloquent cigarette traced an interrogatory "what would you?" in gray smoke.

For the life of me I could not imagine what justification Girond could have for his extraordinary conduct, but I was entirely prepared to listen to his defense. And I knew that in any quarrel between the rueful knight of pots and pans and the amiable Girond I was not likely to prove an unbiased referee.

The coffee, which all this time had hissed unregarded on the range, gave premonitory symptoms of boiling over.

"Pardon, will m'sieu 'ave his coffee in the saloon?" The man of honor was swallowed up in the prince of stewards. A gusty sigh and the creek of timbers told

me, without a backward look, that our sorely tried cookie had collapsed upon a locker.

"And now, Girond," I spoke through the spicy steam of Mocha and Java arising from the cup on the table before me, "what's the row between you and the doctor?"

Napkin on arm and addressing the back of my neck, Girond told his story.

I gathered that Cahill had spoken the truth when he said the men forward were talking. The absence of rats was by no means the only ominous portent which had been observed by the soothsayers of the forecastle. The absurd story about the first officer was going the rounds and I don't know what other rubbish beside. Not a day passed that some inspired idiot did not have a new prodigy with which to regale a goggle-eyed circle of eager listeners. Some of the wonder-mongers were probably sincere enough while others, I mis-doubted, covetous of the prestige afforded by supernatural experience, drew liberally on their imaginations.

"And Cahill," I ventured, "is the worst of the lot?"

"But no, thees Caheel he only laugh and play the fid'," Girond assured me. "When wan man tell a tale, Caheel he laugh and say: 'Now Beel, you tell about the ghos' you see las' night when you were droonk. Or, Jeem, 'ave you hear anymore voices talking when there is no person?' But the others they shake the 'eads. And the more thees Caheel laugh the more tales they tell and the more they shake the 'ead. But of them

al thees sacred rosbif of a cook ees the mos' big fool. I, Girond, myself am skeptique. I believe in nossing except the Bon Dieu a leetle bit. Yet when that cook talk about the terrib' things that will happen to thees sheep, I mak' the shudder."

"It's too bad the men are so foolish," I said. "But you won't cure their superstitions by target practicing on the cook."

"Ah, eet ees not for that I throw the knives at heem." I distinctly heard Girond grind his teeth. "But he mak' the insoolt on M'sieu the Capitaine. He say nobody but wan beeg dam fool sail so onlooky a sheep. He say M'sieu the Capitaine wan driver of slaves and eef we have sense we roon away—we desairt."

I was more profoundly moved by Girond's expression of loyalty to Captain Merrihew than I cared to show. I was also a little embarrassed by it. What the devil can you say to a chap who expresses a highly praiseworthy sentiment by outlining a shipmate with assorted cutlery? I couldn't encourage that particular form of target practice, and even less could I find fault with the motive behind it. I suppose one of your glib sort would have had a neat and tactful speech to fit the occasion. I didn't. I said "h'm" and let it go at that.

I sat wondering what to do. Report to Captain Merrihew the way things were going in the forecandle? Not just yet at any rate. Probably the same sort of talk went on in every forecandle on the seven seas.

Among the inalienable rights of the rank and file in every walk of life are grumbling and criticism of their leaders, and a conveniently deaf ear is always a good thing for those in authority to cultivate.

All the same I resolved to transfer my watchful eye from Cahill to the cook. Also I would cultivate Girond. Aside for my genuine liking for this fiery loyalist, I felt it the part of policy. He would prove a useful ally in the enemy camp, always provided, of course, there was an enemy camp, which I was disposed to doubt. The men seemed by and large a cheerful, contented lot. The next moment I was almost hoping that there might be trouble. It would give me a chance to show the stuff John Holt was made of.

"By the way, Girond," I asked, "where in the world did you get your knack of knife throwing?" I thought he had not heard me—or was not inclined to answer—so long was he in replying.

"You have nevaire hear of Girond the G-r-reat?"
I shook my head.

"He was my father and the mos' great jongleur in the worl'. He was artiste, genius. For him the knife, the plate, anything become alive like a bird. He say go and eet go. He say coom and eet coom. Each of his ten fingers have brain like a man. He can do anything. When he step out on the stage the peop' rise up and mak' the ovation. The ladies they die of loove for the G-r-reat Girond and the kings and the empereurs they mak' heem wan of them. And you nevaire hear

of heem? Sooch ees fame. Not ten yaire has he been gone."

Girond tugged at his mustachio and heaved a great sigh.

"Ah, monsieur, what a man was my father. Not small like me, but prodigeuse and of a presence majestique—and wise, mon père. All the yaire he would be play at the grand theatres. But when the sommaire coom he would grow restive. In his hairt he was always the vagabond. Wan day he would coom home and say: 'Regard, Jean-Jacques, my old, the trees in the Luxembourg 'ave put on their sommaire gowns. It is time for us to see the worl'.' From the time I was a leetle child he would say that. Then he would put on his oldes' coat and we would depart on what he call the grand tour. I 'ave no mother, monsieur, since I am a baby, so we 'ave only to geeve the key to the concierge and our 'ouse ees close.

"Conceive then, the Gr-r-reat Girond in an old coat weeth a knapsack on hees back, tramping from village to village and town to town throughout all the entire France. The pairformance for which Paris geeve many, many golden louis to see, he mak' in the inns and estaminets for the few sous that I get when I pass the 'at. Ah, those were 'appy times, monsieur.

"Behold, my old,' 'e would say. 'Eet is well for the artiste that 'e should live 'ard for a season, for not to grow fat and lose the eenspiration. When you are become a man remembraire that luxury she is the enemy of the art. The artiste, like the

priest, moost on occasion subdue the body to the soul." A philo-sopher, my father.

"And from the time I am vairy small he teach me to use the 'and and the eye and the brain all together. He say to me: 'Jean-Jacques, since of old time there has always been a Girond who is the mos' great jongleur in all the worl', but you shall be the mos' great Girond of them all.' When I am beeger he let me be his assistant—first in our wanderings, then in the theatres. And when the peop' applaud he say: 'Soon they will applaud you. Tiens, méchant, would you rob your old father of hees place in the sun?' Afterwards we go to the café and he says: "Garçon, we mus' 'ave the best wine. We go to drink the 'ealth of the mos' great Girond of them all.'

"Then wan day 'e 'ave a leetle pain. 'C'est rien,' 'e say, but the docteur 'e say: 'My poor fran, you moos die.' A brav' man ees my father. 'Zut alors,' 'e say. 'Eet ees time the stage be clear for the mos' Great Girond of them all.'

"I am glad 'e not leave to see that mos' Great Girond hissed from the stage where 'is father has gained so mooch honneur. I find myself a young fool weeth too mooch money and too leetle sense in the 'ead. At firs' I do vairy well and for the sake of my father the public is kind to 'is son. But I do not remembraire my good father's hadvice. I do not subdue the body to the soul. I dreenk, dreenk all the time, brandy, absinthe. I mak' all the follies. And by and by my 'and shake and my eye ees no good. Peop' applaud no more. They

laugh and hiss. Behol' how great my fall. When I am thirsty I am again a vagabond, passing the 'at in cafés. But thees time it ees not from choice."

I looked at the dapper little man, clear eyed, alert, as fit as a fiddle. I could not believe he had ever been one of those bleary scarecrows you see about the boulevard restaurants of Paris singing cracked-voiced bal-lads or doing pathetically clumsy juggling tricks. He must have been pretty far gone when Merrihew picked him up that night like a starving dog out of the gutter.

I wish I could describe the scene with the dramatic effect Girond threw into it. As he talked I could feel the cold damp stones of the Quai Voltaire against the soles of the worn boots, and the chill of a rainy night striking through the threadbare coat. I stood with Girond in the doorway of the cheap little restaurant shivering with cold while delectable odors set my empty belly thinking on its twelve-hour fast. Furtively I sidled over to an unoccupied table and picked up a cup, a plate, a fork, a glass. With fingers that had not entirely lost their cunning I set the various objects whirling—up, over, down, left hand, right hand, up, over, down. A few of the diners pause to watch my performance. With luck I will eat this night and sleep in a bed. Then crash! I, who was to be the mos' Great Girond in all the worl' have dropped a plate. An angry garçon is demanding payment for the broken crockery. Not a sou? Bien, then it is a matter for the police. The tall Englishman arises from the table. Only

the matter of a smashed plate? That, surely can be arranged.

I can imagine Girond, with some trace of his old self emerging from beneath his rags and misery, thanking the stranger with a bow and a sweep of his disreputable hat. I can imagine Merrihew, with his quick eye for a man, appraising the apparently hopeless creature before him and discerning hope.

"'E called me *monsieur* and invite me to 'ave wine with heem." Merrihew would do a thing like that. He had none of the average Englishman's inability to address a patched elbow as *monsieur*. I can picture Girond expanding under the influence of the wine, and the table d'hôte which accompanied it. With the cigar and coffee he was in the confessional mood.

"A wise man, your father," had been Merrihew's only comment on Girond's story. The ash on his cigar had grown a half-inch before he spoke again. Fifteen minutes later Girond was making his way along the Quai Voltaire with three of Merrihew's louis d'or in his pocket and a note to the paymaster of Merrihew's ship, then lying at Le Havre, directing that the bearer be signed on as messboy.

"That," concluded Girond, "was two, three yaire ago. Many a time Monsieur the Capitaine say, 'Behol', Girond, you are now again a man. Eet is not for the artiste to remain a sairvant.' And I reply, 'Maybe soon, I go.' But regard, monsieur, there is that here which say 'No!'" Girond placed his hand upon his breast.

Chapter IX

BEWARE THE IDES OF MARCH

THE day following my adventure in the Governor's enchanted garden began a new phase of my captivity. Except for brief flashes of divinity, the goddess was become wholly the dangerous dear lady of Mr. Ravenel's description. As beautiful as ever, but more approachable. A laughing, teasing, bewildering creature to be aspired to without guilt of sacrilege.

Her debut in this new rôle was forecast in the postscript of a note addressed to me "kindness of Mr. Ravenel." Under dainty seal of pink wax and in script of irreproachable elegance and feminine illegibility Miss Tempest presented her compliments to Mr. Holt. With down strokes shaded within the thousandth of a hair of the correct thickness and up strokes of a delicacy to bring tears of joy to the eyes of a writing master—she requested the pleasure of Mr. Holt's company at dinner on that very evening at seven o'clock. And her niece, Miss Marcia Tempest, joined in the invitation.

Below, in a bolder hand, that sent the immutable laws of up stroke and down scurrying for their lives, appeared this message: "Do come, I promise not to

lose my fan again." And after the words a splatter of tiny freckles of ink by which a pen, accustomed to a gentler hand, registered its indignant protest. I carried out to Captain Merrihew a note, to all appearance identical with mine, but lacking, I hoped, so friendly a postscript. A man may be your hero and your friend and yet you will bear with more than philosophic resignation his failure to score in certain quarters.

The captain and I were the only guests. As nominal head of a maleless menage, Aunt Sarah, a precious dim pastel of a little gentlewoman, devoted herself to his entertainment. He, on his part, seemed entirely satisfied to leave the niece to my conversational mercies. Looking back on it now, I marvel how simply and naturally I was made intimate of that charming household. Each of the ladies was, in her own way, past mistress of the kindly art of hospitality. I can imagine no guest of theirs feeling himself otherwise than welcome, as free of constraint as the very breezes that ambled about their picturesque old Spanish house. A last-minute plate causes no consternation at a table provided with a plenty which approaches prodigality. Nor has an unexpected caller any terrors for ladies who simply are themselves upon all occasions. More than once I saw a round half-dozen young fellows from the garrison or from a man-o'-war descend upon that devoted house like a plague of locusts. Yet these invasions, which would have reduced an English hostess to a mass of jangled nerves, cost Aunt Sarah not even a passing sigh.

The *Venture* tugged at her anchor and the Austrian rifles, daily expected, did not arrive. I spent as many hours as my hardened conscience would allow entangling myself ever more hopelessly in the web of Marcia Tempest's unconscious weaving. Sometimes on my arrival I would find Captain Merrihew there before me. A blond Othello throwing his spell about the hearts and imaginations of two very dissimilar Desdemonas. And I would sit and listen no less eager-eared than they, for Captain Merrihew had to a remarkable degree the gift of story-telling. His narrative style was vivid, with enough of seriousness to carry conviction and a salt of humor to save it from prosiness. He was one of the few men I have met who could talk of themselves without self-consciousness. He treated himself as though Arthur Merrihew were a third party in whom both narrator and listener were sufficiently interested to be talking about. His chief charm as a raconteur lay, I think, in an absolute lack of that painful pose of self-depreciation which is the most disgusting form of boasting.

Another great point in his favor was, of course, that he had a story to tell. He had gone to sea as a midshipmite half as tall as a marlinspike and had led a not unadventurous life. A far poorer conversationalist could hardly have failed to hold his audience with such material to draw on.

Captain Merrihew's attitude toward the younger of the two ladies puzzled me not a little. He was not the man to remain insensible to the devastating loveliness

of her person and her personality. Yet so far as I could tell, he was every bit as attentive to the aunt as to the niece. To both he accorded a friendly deference. By his manner he proclaimed himself the servant of two equally charming women. I wonder if this impartial behavior of the Captain's did not intrigue at least one other person. For, if mythology is to be credited, goddesses are jealous of their prerogative. In the privacy of our bedroom did we sometimes linger a bit at our mirror to be reassured that our beauty was unimpaired? Did we now and again tap a vexed foot or draw our fine brows together, or bite a lip that had involuntarily uttered some exclamation of impatience? Who knows? Not I.

On certain unbelievably lucky occasions I would find myself sole attendant upon the ladies. Then Aunt Sarah would hover in the background a shadowy and lovable propriety. That more formidable duenna, the outspoken Miranda, I sought to propitiate with gifts of half crowns and an air of distant respect toward her young mistress whenever the terrible woman was by. The half crowns Miranda received with much the same haughty mien as Poohbah's when he endured financial insults; my deportment she regarded with the eye of suspicious hostility.

The *Venture* tugged at anchor and lazy golden day was succeeded by day no less golden and languorous. My heart slept and dreamed warm, luxurious, gorgeous colored dreams, with a little underthrill of fear lest by a sudden movement I awake myself and shatter them.

The bird of my desire perched and sang within easy grasp of a stretched out hand. A little boldness and I had prisoned it—or it had flown beyond my reach forever. Had the decisive action been left to me, heaven knows how long I would have shilly-shallied. But the moment came without warning, finding me unprepared and even unafraid.

The Austrian rifles had arrived at last and were safely stowed. Tonight perhaps, tomorrow night at latest, the *Venture* would up anchor and away. We had been riding, I on one of Mr. Ravenel's horses, she on a gamesome little filly of her own. Our road lay along the shore and we had dismounted to watch the sun march down into the sea. Clouds in white uniforms, faced with scarlet and gold, were drawn up in double ranks to salute great Phœbus as he passed. Against this background of celestial glory she stood, one white hand catching up the skirt of her riding habit and moulding the dark stuff to the salient curves of her sweet body. Of a sudden passion had me by the throat and shook me. Heedless of all save my great need I took her in my arms. The contact of her sent my senses reeling as though I had swallowed a tumblerful of raw brandy. Her lips were soft and cool against mine which burned with fever. But I'll swear she returned my kisses.

In my ears sounded a torrent of words, tumbling over each other without sense or sequence. The words were mine. For she was silent. Still I held her with such force that it must have hurt, and spoke words

that had no meaning—unless to her. Her saucy little beaver had fallen to the ground. The wealth of her hair had poured out over her face and shoulders so that she must shake it from her eyes. Then I felt her arms go about my neck and tighten there. She raised herself on her toes—she was tall for a woman and I no giant—and kissed me of her own will.

"Thank you, Johnny Holt," she said, and wriggled out of my embrace. Then the tears that on the instant welled up in her eyes brimmed over and she let them have their way.

"It's no go, then?" A feeling of hopelessness had reduced me to coherence and the lingua franca of the undergraduate. She shook her head. Already her fingers were busy searching for pins lost in the masses of hair. "And if you only knew how sorry I am that it can't be a go."

"Of course I'm only a schoolboy." My humility was a natural reaction from the great daring of a moment before. "It wasn't to be expected. Naturally you have had dozens of offers from men who have done things, who amount to something in the world. A girl like you would. But, I say, you were a brick not to laugh."

There was reproach in her voice: "Do you think I could value a priceless thing like love so little as to laugh at it?"

I, knowing nothing to say, said it.

There was a great flat rock overlooking the sea, where she sat and finished putting up her hair.

"Sit here beside me and hold my hand," she commanded. And for a time she looked out over the water, thinking.

"You are my friend," she said at last. It was not a question.

"I would—" I was going to say "die," but the expression savored too much of Drury Lane and the melodrama—"I would do anything for you. Anything at all."

She thanked me with a pressure of her fingers.

"Even to handing me into the keeping of another man?"

"Even that."

"Then, listen. There is a man who will say to me 'Come.' At least I hope he will. And I think so. And I will go—oh so gladly. It will be wicked of me and shameless. There are many reasons why I should not go. But they won't matter to me. Not a rush. And you can help me go to him if you will. Please."

"I said 'anything,'" I reminded her.

"He's in danger. How great, I am not sure. I can't even warn him. I can only watch over him as well as I may. And no one can help me but you."

"Tell me what to do and I will do it."

"Blindly, without asking why or wherefore? It's not that I don't trust you. I would trust you with my life. But there are other lives involved. I will ask you to do nothing dishonorable—No, I mustn't say that. Let me be quite open with you and try to understand. Men have queer notions about honor. And all

sorts of scruples that I'm afraid women don't consider. Let's put it this way. If you help me blindly the guilt, if there be guilt, will be all mine. It's only right that it should be, and I am willing to shoulder it. If I told you everything you might feel that you couldn't help me. And you must."

I hesitated. Not that I had any intention of refusing my aid. The trouble in her face would have moved me to engage in midnight assassination if need be. I was merely wondering how to put it.

"I have laid my heart at your feet already. On top of that I lay my life and honor. Use all three as you will. If the heart gets damaged or the life or the honor—so be it. I shall be content to have served you." If that be Drury Lane, make the most of it. I meant it every word.

For the second time she kissed me of her own accord—a kiss as light and swift as a hummingbird. "Johnny Holt, Johnny Holt, the woman who can hear you say that and not love you, doesn't live. But you musn't say it any more or you will have me in tears again."

"Then," I said lightly, being afraid of getting weepy myself, "let's get down to business. Tell me as much or as little as you please. Give your orders and I will carry them out to the best that's in me."

"And if people should ever say that Marcia Tempest is a brazen, heartless adventuress and worse? A woman without modesty, without—"

Very gently I placed my hand upon her lips. Not even she herself should speak such things of her.

"But if they should, you at least will think a little kindly of me in your heart?" she persisted. "I cannot believe that you will not understand—a little."

"I think I shall. I know I shall. Whatever you may do, however appearances may be against you, I, at least, shall have perfect trust and faith." Thin ice for one as heavily laden with emotions as I was at that moment. I hurried on. "What am I to do?"

"First," she said, "I must tell you his name. It is your own Captain Merry."

"Captain Merry!" I exclaimed, in my astonishment forgetting that it was not for me to be prying into her heart. "Why, he hasn't seen you more than a half-a-dozen times."

"More than that. But even so—" with sweet effrontery—"how many times must a man see me before—?"

I was all contrition. "Once was enough to settle my business, at any rate. It was only that I had not thought of you and Captain Merry in that way."

"Oh, he hasn't spoken yet, but he will. I know it by the pricking in my thumbs, and in other ways much surer."

"Miss Tempest, I wish you every happiness. If there is any man good enough for you it is Captain Merry. No wonder with him in the field, you could not think of me."

"My name is Marcia. 'Miss Tempest' sounds too dreadfully reproachful. If you should be hurt or angry with me now, Johnny Holt—"

"As if I could be, Marcia."

I still have the smile she gave me. I have just taken it out to look at it for the hundred thousandth time and it is as fresh and radiant as ever.

"But as to your 'no wonder,'" she continued, "let me tell you, as wonderful a man as Arthur Merry is, I know another just as wonderful. And Arthur would be the first to acknowledge that I am right if I could tell him all I know—as I will some day." Was ever rejected suitor's wound soothed by dearer balm? Again the thin ice creaks, strained to the breaking point. I must on.

"But this danger you speak of? Can't you tell me what it is?"

"As I said before, I am not sure. I only know the direction from which it will come, if at all. And I can't even tell you the direction just now. I must ask you not to mention it even to Captain Merry. It would do no good and might spoil everything. There is nothing to be done at present. We must wait and watch. But you will stand ready to help me when I call on you?"

"You can be sure of that, at least."

"I know it. And you will forgive me for telling you so little and asking so much. If only I could tell you everything and let you advise me. But I can't."

She sprang to her feet, dragging me after her. "While we have been talking the sun has deserted us. Come on or Aunt Sarah will think you have run away with me." Hand in hand we raced to where the horses,

perfectly trained to stand with dropped reins, were quietly foraging. Her foot scarcely pressed the stirrup of my clasped fingers as she rose to the saddle. We gave our horses their heads and pounded along at a pace too swift to permit of further conversation. Now and again I caught a glimpse of a flushed and happy face or a smile flashed to me over her shoulders. Do the courageous ones of earth, I wonder, have this blessed faculty of shedding anxiety like a useless garment, or is it this ability that makes them courageous?

As we trotted up to the veranda Captain Merrihew swung down the low steps and strode to meet us. "By the gods," I could not help thinking, "if any man is worthy of this golden girl—" If there was any taint of jealousy in my heart I am glad that I don't remember it.

From somewhere out of the shadows a colored boy materialized at our horses' heads. Captain Merrihew raised his arms and she bent towards him. Seemingly without effort he held her a moment in mid air. And, as I have said, she was tall for a woman, and no thin-flanked, fade-away school-miss, but a superb young goddess. As he held her there at arm's length he laughed, and so did she. His was the low, contented laugh of the man who glories in the possession of a rare treasure, hers of a woman well content to be possessed. I wonder if a lion at his mating might not croon gruffly so and be thus answered by a purring wherein fierceness was tamed to gentleness for once. Not unlike lions were they, this tawny pair. In both

there was the leonine suggestion of latent strength. Both I could credit with indomitable courage and passions of elemental intensity. Two strays from times a bit more spacious than ours—Elizabeth's perhaps or Trojan Helen's. Fit mates, I thought them, then. Fit mates, I have thought many a time since.

Miss Tempest and Captain Merrihew had entered the house. I was on the point of following them when I caught sight of Miranda's turbaned head peering cautiously round a column of the veranda and obeyed her beckoning finger.

"Young gentleman," she spoke softly as one not taking the world into confidence, "tell the big captain to walk in the middle of the road and not be friends with strangers."

"What do you mean, Miranda?"

An ominous shake of the head was her only answer.

"You know something. What is it?" My anxiety made me speak impatiently.

Her nether lip protruded, giving her the appearance of a stubborn camel. "Miranda knows what she knows. Tell the big Captain to walk in the middle of the road and not be friends with strangers."

Heroic measures seemed to be in order. I produced a sovereign. Her eyes glinted with covetousness. She half extended a hand. "Young gentleman, if you loves the big captain tell him what I say."

There was no more water to be gotten at that pump. Like every oracle that ever was, Miranda must speak in riddles or not at all. I slipped the gold-piece into her

hand and she was gone. For all her weight, she moved swiftly and with no other sound than a dry serpentine rustle.

The situation would stand a bit of thinking over. Twice within the hour I had been warned of some danger shadowing Captain Merrihew's path. Marcia Tempest, avowedly in love with him, had stipulated that I should not tell him of her fears. The black woman, under the charm which he seemed to exert on all who came in contact with him, had reiterated the warning. But she had bound me to no secrecy. I would repeat her words, at least, to Captain Merrihew.

I canvassed the possibility of taking one or the other of the officers of the *Venture* into my confidence and asking his advice. Lamar? Somehow I shrank from opening my mind to this unquiet soul. Would a man frying in his own little private hell have a great deal to offer in the way of sympathy or counsel? Mr. MacAlpin? My problem had to do with neither engines nor controversial theology. March I dismissed without a second thought. His honest, schoolboy face did not mark him as a man to help in a situation which called for nice footwork. Mr. Ravenel? Ah, that was better. But was there any use in going to a man for advice when you couldn't tell him the whole story? And how could I betray a girl's heart secrets even to so kindly an old gentleman as the Confederate agent? Every way I looked was a blind alley. I began to think I was overly young for a father confessor and overly dull for a dabbler in intrigue.

"Girond! There's the man for my money!" I spoke the words half aloud. There was loyalty and a nimble wit as well as nimble fingers, or I was much mistaken.

In Mon Capitaine's service the little man would keep his eyes and ears open and his mouth shut. He would not require explanations, but only opportunity to prove his fealty.

"We'll win or the devil's in it!" She and I—and Girond. I braced my shoulders and let my load of troubles and misgivings slip. The thud was almost audible. I felt my spirits rising in spite of the crushing disappointment my hopes had received. Old Emerson is right enough. There is a law of compensation. To all young men unlucky in love, this bit of counsel. If you cannot possess the object of your idolatry, relinquish her with a generous gesture. And serve her from that day henceforth forever more, until she no longer need your service. There is a law of compensation, as you will find some day soon or late.

Chapter X

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

IN spite of my many perplexities, dinner that evening was by way of being a celebration.

"We've got our sailing orders. We clear tonight," Captain Merrihew had announced. Although Marcia Tempest must have known our departure was imminent, she caught her breath and her brows contracted as if with a spasm of pain. Little Aunt Sarah rose to the occasion like the trump she was.

"In the cellar," she said, "we have some wine which was the pride of my poor brother's life. It went twice around the world before it was laid down goodness knows how many years ago. He opened it only on high days and special occasions. And this, my dear—" she turned to her niece—"is surely a special occasion when we wish our friends Godspeed and a safe return."

The wine was had up.

"The first toast shall be mine." Marcia Tempest was on her feet, lifting high a glass. "We'll drink it standing. Here's to a dark night, a quick run and blast the Yankee cruisers." Aunt Sarah polished off her glass as manfully as any. A difficult moment had been bridged. From then on we were a right merry company.

Captain Merrihew bubbled with a triumph he made no attempt to conceal. Naturally he had no idea that he might be dancing on the grave of *my* young hopes, and Marcia, flushed and starry-eyed, scintillated to his mood, as a precious jewel to the sun. As to myself I was enjoying the first rosy glow of renunciation. Of course, the captious critic might have suggested that the renunciation was not entirely voluntary, but there was no such unpleasant person present. Then, too, I defy any young gentleman to be absolutely downhearted in my situation. The lights were dimming in the pit, the orchestra was swinging into the final chords of the overture, and the curtain was on the point of rising for the first act of the Great Adventure.

Much as we might have been disposed to linger, it was necessary that we make our adieus of the briefest. Whatever confidences Marcia Tempest and Captain Merrihew had to exchange, were given and received in the presence of the most discreet of confidants, the piano. For perhaps ten minutes she was seated playing softly while he leaned with an elbow on the top of the instrument, and I devoted myself to Aunt Sarah at the further end of the drawing-room. It was only at the last that I had a word with my lady, dear as ever but no longer dangerous. "Leave your horse here, Mr. Holt," she said, "I shall see that he is returned to Mr. Ravenel in the morning." Then in a lower key for my ear alone, "Remember I'm trusting you to help me—and *him*, Johnny Holt."

"I won't forget."

"Just before you sail, I may have need to send you a message. Be on the lookout for a boat. And now good-bye and good luck to you for a very gallant gentleman. And, oh my dear, I am very happy."

By the gods, she looked it, as she crossed to where Captain Merrihew was taking leave of Aunt Sarah.

"And now, young Holt," says Captain Merrihew, setting a brisk pace, "it's time we were aboard. I fancy Mr. Ravenel will be there before us and wearing out the deck with his tramping up and down. Patience is not one of his virtues." And he chuckled delightedly.

"I say, sir," I gasped, for the way we were making left me little breath to spare. "I had almost forgot. I have a message for you—from Miranda."

"And what says Miranda?"

"'Tell the big captain to walk in the middle of the road and not be friendly with strangers.' Try as I would that's all I could get out of her. What do you make of it, sir?"

"A warning," he replied. "And one I think we'll do well to heed. Miranda's a bit of a witch and evidently well disposed toward us. On the whole—" he glanced quickly about and stepped into the center of the road—"we might as well follow her advice literally."

Made anxious as I was by Marcia Tempest's words, I was relieved to find him taking Miranda's hint seriously. "But what could Miranda know of any mischief being brewed?" I asked.

"These negroes have mysterious sources of informa-

tion and means of communication all their own," he replied. "But not so mysterious at that when you come to think of it. You must remember that all the waiters in the bars and hotels and all the house-servants are blacks. They have opportunity of overhearing a deal of talk not meant for their ears. And they are incurable gossips among themselves. I'll wager many a dark secret whispered by one white man to another in the morning is common knowledge among the negroes from St. George's to Hamilton before sundown."

As we made our way through the dark forest of boxes and bales and casks on the now deserted wharf where a ship's boat awaited us, a man detached himself from the shadows. "Captain Merry?" he inquired, at the same time extending an envelope. "A note from Mr. Ravenel for you, sir."

Captain Merrihew turned to the messenger. "And where will I find Mr. Ravenel?"

"It's just a step, sir. I'll show you the way," the man, a decent enough sailor-looking chap, replied.

"You might as well come along, too, Holt. Lead on, my man."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Our guide's "just a step" proved rather longer than that. We had turned half-a-dozen corners before we emerged into a street where small shops were sandwiched in between residences of respectable if not pretentious appearance. "Here we are, sir," the man said, stopping before a door and performing vigorously upon

the knocker. The portal opened disclosing a dark hallway. "Two gentlemen to see Mr. Ravenel," he announced.

Captain Merrihew had entered and I was preparing to follow when I was assisted by a violent push from behind, which sent me reeling. The door crashed to and a key grated in the lock. Staggering forward and clutching wildly at nothingness I cannoned into a yielding object. I was seized about the body and I felt against my face the rasp of the coarse wool of a man's coat.

"Mind your eye, bullies, there's two on 'em," a gruff voice called from somewhere in the darkness. There was the spat of a hard fist against bare flesh, followed by a grunt and the thud of a body against the wall. A volley of bad language, cut suddenly short by a second smack. A scuffling of feet and a deal of hard breathing. The arms which had closed with crushing force about my ribs, momentarily relaxed their grip, but before I could wriggle free of their grasp a pair of hands had me by the throat—rough calloused hands that I felt could and would choke the life out of me. I was afraid. Horribly afraid. Once let those fingers sink into the flesh, I thought—I lowered my chin and stiffened the muscles of my neck. Instinctively my hands sought the wrists of my assailant. Then there flashed across my mind a dodge that Worthington had picked up in some of his rambles through the less savory pur-
lieus of London and taught me. If a man of superior strength has you by the wind pipe you haven't the

ghost of a show tugging at his wrists. But lock your fingers and bring up your clasped hands sharply in an arc from left to right against his wrists, and the chances are you will break his hold. With all the strength I could muster I struck—and I was free. Gasping for breath I flattened myself against the wall. I sensed rather than saw my antagonist lurch forward toward the spot where I had been the smallest fraction of a second before. Whether by accident or design, I know not to this day, I extended a foot. He tripped and measured his length on the floor. For half an instant I had opportunity to take stock of my surroundings. I noted for the first time, not a light, but a darkness less dense at the farther end of the hallway. A current of fresh air told of an open door in that direction. But between me and liberty there milled a knot of men, how many I could not tell. For what seemed minutes I stood there flat as a lizard against the wall listening to the shuffling of feet and the heavy breathing as of men tugging at a weight beyond their strength. There were no more sounds of blows or curses now. Not a word was spoken. The stag was at bay and the pack grimly and silently had closed in to pull him down.

A dreadful sense of impotence and indecision was on me. The darkness and the very numbers of his assailants crowded into the narrow confines of the hallway had worked to Captain Merrihew's advantage, but the unequal contest could not last much longer. Even his strength must bow to the weight of numbers.

Meantime what should I do? Make a futile attempt to help him or try to escape and summon aid?

"Holt," Captain Merrihew's voice rang out and my heart gave a bound. "Fire in the direction of my voice. Don't be afraid of hitting me. The scoundrels are all around me."

There was a sudden outbreak of confused shouts liberally sprinkled with oaths. "Look out, mates, the — is going to shoot." "Down, you — — fools! do you want your bloody heads blown off?" Everywhere, it seemed, men were dropping as before a withering volley of musketry.

"Back to the door, Holt," Captain Merrihew called, "and shoot the first swine that moves a finger."

Our foes must have credited me with having eyes like a cat. If I had been armed with a fowling piece, only by the veriest luck could I have winged my man in that darkness. The silence was complete, unbroken even by the sound of breathing.

With my back to the wall I sidled towards the door. My heel came down on something squashy that rolled beneath my weight. But they might have been a dead man's fingers for all the protest raised. I was near the open door now. My nerves bunched suddenly and it was with difficulty that I restrained a cry. A hand had closed on my arm. Then to my unspeakable relief I realized it was Captain Merrihew's. In another moment we were outside, and in half-a-dozen jumps we had cleared the small garden that lay back of the house. A five-foot wall barred our progress. Without break-

ing his stride Merrihew vaulted to the top of the wall and sat astride it. One powerful hand was twisted in my collar. My hands had scarcely touched the top of the wall when I found myself on my feet on the other side. We raced down a dark and narrow alleyway and burst into a wider thoroughfare.

Captain Merrihew slackened his pace to a brisk walk. "Well, young Holt, and how do you find yourself?" he inquired. "All right, sir," I replied, somewhat tremulously I am afraid. Certainly my knees had a tendency to buckle under me and there was a painful throbbing at my throat. In the uncertain light of the street lamps Captain Merrihew seemed none the worse for wear except that he was hatless.

"Stout fellow." He laughed and clapped me on the shoulder. And a moment later: "To think of my running our heads into a noose like that—and after Miranda's friendly hint, too."

Chapter XI

WE HOOD THE BINNACLE

"WELL, well, Captain Merry, I'm mighty glad to see you, sir. Powerful glad." Mr. Ravenel greeted us at at the gangway. "I've been stomping up and down the deck for the last half hour nervous as a colt on a frosty morning, sir. It's a perfect night for a run."

"I'm glad to be here myself sir," replied the captain. "Especially as Mr. Holt and I met some friends who were most anxious to detain us. In fact we had great difficulty in tearing ourselves away." And Captain Merrihew proceeded to give the Confederate agent a brief account of our adventure. To my surprise Mr. Ravenel did not explode. Perhaps his sense of outrage was too deep to find relief in words. Instead he puffed out his cheeks to their fullest dimensions and expelled his breath with a low whistle.

"Sometimes, sir, I almost find myself admirin' that man Coffin. But we haven't any proof so it's no use me kickin' up a row. You can't hang even a Yankee without evidence." He rubbed his chin ruefully as he pondered the unreasonable nature of legal procedure. "I agree with Mr. Bumble. 'The law is a ass.' Well, sir, I'm mighty glad you came through top side up and

no buttons off. If you hadn't shown up by an hour after sailing time I'd have told Mr. Lamar to sail without you. I'd have been terrible sorry to send the *Venture* to sea without her master, but with the way Richmond is hollerin' for supplies we can't afford to lose a day if we can help it."

"I understand perfectly, sir," said Captain Merrihew, "And I shouldn't have blamed you in the least. Mr. Lamar"—he turned to the first officer who had been standing by in silence—"have all hands summoned forward of the bridge, if you please. Send Mr. MacAlpin and Mr. March up and join us yourself. Come on, Mr. Ravenel. And you too, Holt."

The bosun's whistle shrilled and on the echo the men came tumbling up. With a slapping of bare feet and a scuffing of heavy boots they gathered below the bridge, some two dozen in all. Under the light cast by the lanterns the weathered and tanned faces of the seamen contrasted oddly with the soot-streaked pallor of Mr. MacAlpin's imps from the fire room. In the front rank I noticed the neat little figure of Girond and the foolish, good-natured countenance of Cahill.

"Are all hands here?" Captain Merrihew called down from the bridge.

"All hands, sir," replied the bosun.

"Men," Captain Merrihew spoke hardly above a conversational tone, "we are sailing at once. Out beyond the harbor there is a Federal cruiser lying in wait for us. For the next two days, or until we make Charleston, we will be constantly in danger of capture

and a Yankee prison. If we are fired on we will run for it. I have no intention of exposing your lives needlessly, but while there is a chance of escape I will not surrender this vessel. I wish to warn you that your lives and liberty will depend upon prompt and implicit obedience to orders.

"Before weighing anchor, all deck lights will be extinguished and all ports kept tightly closed during the hours of darkness. The only light on deck will be the binnacle lamp which will be masked. There will be no smoking on deck after sundown. A lighted match can be seen as far as a lighted lantern on a dark night. There will be no loud talking or unnecessary noise while in the vicinity of hostile cruisers. Silence is particularly important as we approach the Carolina coast. Cook, have you any cocks in the hen coop?"

"Aye, sir," squeaked that functionary, "we 'as one, sir."

"Kill him," the captain directed. "We can't have him crowing and giving away our position. Men," he continued, "you are drawing good wages, much more than you would be paid in either the naval or the merchant service. Upon the completion of a successful run you will receive a bonus in addition, as was explained to you when you signed on. In return I expect man-o'-war discipline to be maintained. Any disobedience, especially the showing of lights or other acts which may endanger the ship, will be considered mutiny. If there are any of you unwilling to make the

voyage let them step forward. They will be paid off and set ashore."

There was dead silence. Not a man moved from his place.

"Good, I'm glad to see I have a stout-hearted lot of men."

"Three cheers for Cap'n Merry, mates. With a will now," said a voice. And with a will it was, Cahill's bull's bellow and little Girond's shrill pipe being plainly audible.

"All ship shape with your engines, I take it, Mr. MacAlpin?" asked the captain, when the men had trooped away to their stations.

"They're ready to do their ten knots and can do fourteen under pairsuasion, sir."

"Good. And you have opened your heart to our friend from Salem?"

"Aye, sir. I have followed your suggestion in that quarter. I was aboard the *Nancy Bradford* the morn' inquirin' most parteecular concairnin' the water aboot Gurnet's head. 'Tis for certain the *Seneca* will be watchin' off Paget Island,' I says, 'that bein' the short lane out. So we'll gae the long way, round Robin Hood's barn.' Sae the Salem lad wished me luck and shook me by the hand with great ceremony. I left the chiel spittin' tobacco in the salt sea and wonderin' whether I was a daft loon that couldna keep my tongue from clackin' or whether I was aimin' to mislead him."

Captain Merrihew laughed while Mr. Ravenel

quaked and coughed and god-blessed himself. Then he god-blessed us all very heartily, shook each of us warmly by the hand and took his departure over the side.

"Mr. March, you may take in the anchor," Captain Merrihew directed. "Then remain forward and keep a sharp eye out for the *Seneca*. Mr. Lamar, you will stay on the bridge with me. Mr. Holt, see that all ports are closed and that no deck lights are showing."

Even as I descended from the bridge the white star at our foremast head winked out. From end to end the *Venture* was but an uncertain fog-hued phantom, resting silent and motionless on the dark water. My tour of inspection over I strolled aft. The darkness was almost absolute. Overhead showed a moonless sky streaked with sullen clouds as though laid on with an inky brush. On the starboard quarter were the lights of St. George's and nearer at hand the clusters of luminous points that were ships at anchor. A few cable's-lengths away the *Nancy Bradford*, with two lighted ports showing, seemed to be watching us out of yellow cat's eyes. There she lay, the old tabby, alert to warn her tom out yonder in the darkness that the old gray rat was at last venturing forth from his hidey-hole. Underfoot Mr. MacAlpin's giant children, stirring from their long sleep, sent a shudder running the *Venture's* length, so that she seemed to quiver with the same scared joy that was beginning to beat in my own veins.

Marcia Tempest had said that she might have occa-

sion to send a message at the last moment. Well, the anchor chain was clink-clanking in, and the last moment was here. I walked to the rail and peered into the gloom overside. There was no sign of a boat. Perhaps she had over-estimated the danger, whatever it was. Perhaps there was no need of a message. Well, no news was good news. So great was my faith in this girl that I could not believe she could be unsuccessful in communicating with me, had there been need. A *shoosh* of steam and a lazy slap of the paddles. The last moment was come and gone.

I turned away from the rail with a sigh—of relief or disappointment, I know not which. The peril which threatened Captain Merrihew was either past or not yet imminent—*thank heaven*. But I had lost or must defer the opportunity of proving my devotion—*confound the luck*.

"Johnny Holt." The low voice in my ear gave me an actual physical start.

"What?" I said, and "what?"

A slim white hand stole from beneath the dark cloak and drew me into the deeper shadow of the deck house.

"I told you to expect a message at the last minute. I am the message."

I stood stupidly looking into the wan oval of her face and the great pools of shadows that were her eyes. I could think of nothing to say but "What? How?"

"I got aboard a few minutes ago when everybody

was over there." She pointed a finger vaguely in the direction of the bridge. There was something pathetically childlike in her gesture. "Miranda's son rowed me out, and she and he together helped me up. It was an awful struggle. I thought I would fall into the water, our boat rocked so with their tramping about. But I made it. Only I'm afraid I have torn my gown."

"But why?"

"I had to come, I thought and thought and thought, but I couldn't think of any other way out."

I glanced in the direction of the *Nancy Bradford*, whose receding lights showed the progress we were making.

"I'll call Captain Merry," I said. "We must stop and put you ashore."

"You shan't. You shan't put me ashore."

"Well, at any rate—" I began.

"And you mustn't tell him I'm aboard either. Not until it is too late to turn back."

Here was a facer. "But, Miss Tempest—Marcia—look here—you see—"

"I only see that you don't want to help me. Well, go and tell Captain Merry. It will ruin everything and I shall hate you and him. I won't care what becomes of any of you or myself either." There she stood a-droop like a flower that has been roughly treated by a rainstorm. And there I stood feeling like a brute beast.

"Child," I felt infinitely the elder at the moment, "I

promised to help you willingly and blindly. And so I will. An ogre could do no less."

She took my arm and snuggled up to me as if she were in reality the child I had called her. "Oh, I knew you would. While I was hiding here I was so fearful. I'm just a girl, after all, and women don't make good adventuresses, I'm afraid. Even those who have to do daring things, hate it, I'm sure, and quake inside when they seem boldest. But I'm not frightened—now."

To reassure her—well, hang it, have it your own way—in any case I put an arm about her shoulders and found she was trembling. "I'm waiting your commands," I said.

"First you must find me somewhere to stay. Anywhere will do, just so there aren't any mice. And I don't mind mice—much."

I laughed. "Leave it to me. But I will have to take Girond into our confidence."

At that she drew back. "Who's Girond?"

"Girond," I said, "is the prince of stewards. A man of infinite resource and versatility. Blood brother to the Admirable Crichton. The acme of discretion and absolutely devoted to Captain Merry."

She laughed—a clear ringing laugh which she instantly smothered with her hand. "If Girond be on our side—"

"We shall sleep softly and fare sumptuously," I finished for her. "Wait till I call him."

I went to the companionway. "Girond," I called. "Oui, monsieur." Velvet-footed he came.

"Did Captain Merry tell you we were to have a passenger to Charleston—a lady?"

"But no, monsieur. It does not mattaire. I will 'ave madame's cabeen arrange' at wance. A vairy, vairy pretty cabeen, madame. And madame's luggages?" She indicated a tiny traveling bag and a bandbox. A wave of pity, I don't know why, brought a lump to my throat. Such a forlorn little heap was "madame's luggages." I could fancy her accustomed to travelling with a whole herd of boxes, and a flock of shawls and rugs or other feminine impedimenta. More than ever she seemed like a lost child, adrift in the world. I forgot that Captain Merrihew was her natural protector under the circumstances and determined on that rôle for myself.

If Girond, that prince of stewards, was amazed at the lightness of her equipment he made no sign. If one lady passenger, or a dozen, chose to be rained down from heaven instead of coming aboard the regulation way, and whatever luggage she or they might elect to carry—it was his to make her or them comfortable.

"If madame will follow me." He whisked up the bag and bandbox. A smile. That was for thanks. A shake of the head. That was for discretion. And she fled after Girond.

"All lights out and ports closed, sir," I reported to Captain Merrihew on the bridge. He nodded. "You may show your light, now, Mr. Lamar."

The first officer lifted an up-ended bucket under which a light had been burning. "Just a few seconds. We don't want to seem ostentatious about it. Now." And Mr. Lamar clapped the bucket down again. Three times this manoeuver was repeated at intervals of several minutes.

"That fetched him," Captain Merrihew said, as the lantern was doused for the third time. Over in the direction from which the *Nancy Bradford* watched us with her unwinking yellow cat's eyes, a white light over a red was climbing to an invisible masthead. "Cautious beggar," the captain commented. "Wanted to be dead certain of our course before showing his signal. I only hope the *Seneca* has a boat lying close in to pick it up. It would be too bad if they failed to see it."

Perhaps five minutes later Captain Merrihew directed a change of course. The coxswain who was steering sent his wheel spinning. The lights of St. George's which had been almost dead astern veered round to larboard. We looked anxiously back. The white over red still rode serenely at the *Nancy Bradford's* masthead.

When later we got the lift of the open sea there was no sign of the *Seneca*.

"You may lay your course for Charleston, Mr. Lamar. Good night," said Captain Merrihew.

"Very good, sir, and good night," replied the first officer.

"Good night, sir," I called to Mr. Lamar as I

prepared to descend after the captain. The first officer did not answer; I doubt if he heard me. He was looking up at the somber sky overhead as sailors do for weather signs, and dark as it was, I could see his white face. His brow was contracted as if in pain. Many times I have seen murderers facing the red-robed judge for sentence and on some of their faces I have seen written the same black despair. His fingers clenched into hard fists. Slowly they opened and closed again.

Chapter XII

I FILL MY PIPE

I HAD expected to devote the next hour or so to thinking things out. To reducing the chaotic events of the day to some semblance of order and to considering the problems they had brought in their train.

Little by little and day by day there had grown up about our ship and her company an air of mystery. To the ordinary and expected hazards which a blockade runner might reckon on there was added a most unquieting fourth dimension of peril. The warm darkness through which the *Venture* seemed to cleave her way as through a dense black fog which immediately closed down again behind her, I could almost imagine to be peopled with sinister shapes of evil with watchful eyes, patient and baleful. I felt very much alone, standing there on the deserted deck—as though I were a sentinel over a sleeping camp, fearful of approaching danger, yet uncertain whether I should wake my comrades and share with them my alarm. Decidedly I knew too much for my own peace of mind and too little to form any definite plan of action. Many persons had confided in me and I in none. I was repository of too many secrets and half hints. I was the focal point in

this whole mysterious business. Was I justified in keeping so much to myself? It would bear a bit of thinking.

I must marshal my facts and conjectures. To begin with there was the matter of the substitution of the Newcastle coal for good Welsh stuff. That was not the work of an enemy, in all likelihood, but only a bit of sharp practice on the part of some ship chandler. The mutterings of discontent in the fore-castle and that tosh about rats and Jonahs were perhaps more serious. I must consult someone about that. Mr. Lamar. No, I couldn't very well tell him he was suspected of being the Jonah himself. And speaking of Mr. Lamar—what was the particular hag which was riding him into premature old age? None of my business at all events, however sorry I might be for the man himself. As for the matter of the crew, I'd talk to Captain Merrihew or Mr. MacAlpin.

Miranda's sibylline foretelling of danger, with the attack on the Captain and myself following so closely in its heels? At all events that was a danger done with, and readily traceable to the Yankee consul with the unlovely name. Nothing so mysterious there.

That brings us to Marcia Tempest and her fears for Captain Merrihew's welfare—and her presence aboard the *Venture* at this very moment. "And here," I thought to myself, "we are at the very heart of the mystery. If she would, she could explain it all. But she won't." Hastily I banished the suggestion of disloyalty. Poor, brave, dear lady, she couldn't. For

whatever reason, she could not draw aside the veil. And did it become me as her liege man to attempt to peer behind it?

Thus for all my marshalling of fact and conjecture I could do little or nothing except wait and watch. But one thing I could do. Draw up a list of probable allies and enemies. Beginning at the top and running down. Mr. Lamar—capable, devoted to Captain Merrihew and the Southern Cause. Mr. MacAlpin—above suspicion. March, ditto. The bosun and the other petty officers—good men all, so far as I could tell. Girond—surely no room for doubt there. Cahill—"a shirker" according to Mr. Lamar, but an honest, good-natured soul to my way of thinking and with more than a little shrewdness hidden beneath his guileless surface. A pourer of oil upon troubled waters. The men—some good and some indifferent—the ordinary run of the forecastle probably. Negligible at any rate. There remained only the cook. No subtle intriguing brain, no courageous malevolence could ever survive those stifling blankets of flesh. Where, then, was I to look for enemies, unless, indeed, as sinister formless shapes in the darkness?

Yet there were enemies somewhere. Marcia Tempest was not the woman to shriek at the sight of a mouse or cower under the bedclothes during a thunderstorm. She was the sort that in the old days would have belted her man's sword to his side and sent him to battle with a smile. If she scented danger, danger there was, no hysterical imaginings such as a more timorous nature

might have entertained. I had no more doubt of her courage than of Captain Merrihew's own.

The fact that she had stowed away on the *Venture* was significant likewise. For all her goddess-like serenity, which might disdain petty conventions, hers was a right womanly dignity. She was not the hoyden to go adventuring along of a shipful of men for the fun of the thing. Not even her confessed love for Captain Merrihew would have brought her along merely for the sake of his society. No, there was some motive graver than a woman's whim behind her conduct.

But by the gods, I was glad she was here instead of back yonder in St. George's. I felt the need of a cleverer head than my own at this juncture. I gathered confidence from her presence. She and I and Girond—we three together against the devil himself.

I found myself yawning. I yawned prodigiously in the face of Girond, who waylaid me to report that madame was mos' comfortabl' an' weesh monsieur a vairy good night an' mooch thanks. I yawned over my undressing, a process not hastened by my weighted eyelids and five thumbs to a hand. Jolly to be at sea again with the motherly old Atlantic rocking you to sleep in your little bed. Jolly to be sailing to meet Adventure out there in the night ahead. Jolly old Francie Drake leaning on high heaven's ramparts, Jolly old . . .

From a sleep of forty fathoms and no bottom, I shot to the surface broad awake. Not a sound but the regular thud of the engines and the slap of a wave against

the side. No, there was something else. An odd bird-like piping call. *Thrit, thrit—threet, threet, threet.* Now, what the devil, and how and where? There flashed across my memory the night in the Governor's enchanted garden. My fruitless search for the fan. The shadow that had moved back of the bench on which she was seated.

I lay still. The call was not repeated, but I heard steps along the deck as of a man walking rapidly on the balls of his feet.

The scrape of something along the wall of my cabin. The buttons on a man's sleeve. The creak of a port being opened cautiously somewhere near at hand.

"Great God, Marcia!" It was Lamar's voice. Hardly more than a whisper but with all the quality of a cry.

"I must speak with you. Now. At once. Can you come in without being seen?" She spoke with a breathless earnestness.

"I reckon so. I'm just coming off watch. Stand by your door. If the coast is clear I'll dodge in."

Almost immediately I heard a door open and close softly. Then a dialogue carried on in quick, passionate whispers, the sound of which, but not the sense, carried through the thin partition separating my cabin from the next. I lay in my bunk, listening, yet trying not to. Straining my ears involuntarily to catch the words which were falling with the meaningless persistence of rain. In my heart was swelling a black hatred for the man I had pitied and the woman I had loved. I have often pondered since on the swiftness with which an

edifice of confidence, even one slowly built through years, and which you believe unshakable, can come tumbling down between one breath and the next. An act, a word, a look, almost, can do it.

For the first time I was to know the real meaning of jealousy. The vile thing had me by the vitals. It filled me with a deep disgust like seasickness. I could taste the bitterness of it in my tongue and I felt the clammy sweat gathering on my brow.

So I lay listening, while my imagination, with diabolical cruelty, held up before my tortured soul picture after picture. She in flushed and lovely dishevelment with her loosened hair about her shoulders. She in his arms while he rained kisses on her lips and eyes and violated the sanctuary of her bosom. And she responding to his beastliness. God, if they would only stop their whispering. Hissing like two snakes at their unhallowed amours. But why not? What were they but snakes? Cold-hearted, treacherous reptiles. She with her mien of proud, unapproachable virginity and he with his air of breeding and asceticism. I plunged my head beneath the bed coverings, but I could not shut out that infernal whispering and once I thought I heard her laugh. That same low contented purr of hers. When had I heard it before? That very afternoon as she hung suspended in mid air between Merrihew's strong hands. And now it was for Lamar.

"If ever anyone should say that Marcia Tempest is a brazen, heartless adventuress and worse"—those had been her words. And I had countered with a speech

which would have done credit to the hero of a Drury Lane melodrama. How she must have laughed to herself. "Adventuress?" Gad, I knew good Saxon words that fitted the case more plumply. And even as I cursed her, I shuddered as an apostate who desecrates the altar where once he worshipped, yet still is fearful of an angry God.

And for my own weakness I hated her the more. The hand of circumstances was rubbing salt in the wound of my sadly hurt vanity—a wound which heretofore had been soothed by the balm of her kindness.

I flung on my clothes and sought the deck. Through interminable hours of darkness I stared out into a black sea. Messalina! Treacherous to me and false to the man who was my friend. Yes, it was a two-edged sword of jealousy which bit both ways. But worst of all—I can admit it now after all these years—was the sense of my own humiliation. I had strutted my poor chivalry before a woman who was laughing at me as I mouthed and postured. Why is it that the remembrance of a generous impulse may in retrospect bring deeper shame than the remembrance of guilt itself?

Well, I must revise my list of enemies and friends. It was not that grotesque mountain of a cook I must watch, but the very two I had counted on most confidently. It was no formless shape of evil lurking in the darkness I had to fear, but the woman I had sworn to help, and the man who had won at once my pity and my respect. At any rate, my course was clear before me. At the earliest opportunity I must acquaint Cap-

tain Merrihew with all I knew and suspected. I dreaded the interview. It is no welcome task to shatter a friend's illusions concerning the woman he loves. But there was no help for it.

At long last a cold gray light began to filter over a deserted ocean while a slug-a-bed sun still slept behind a bank of mist on the horizon. "A high dawn brings a fine day." I recalled a bit of weather lore I had picked up. "A hell of a fine day for you, my friend."

March was pacing back and forth on the bridge, his hands in the pockets of his reefer. I included him in my catalogue of hates. "Damn you, young beef and bottled beer, no woman will ever make *you* suffer." With that I carried my burden of sorrows to the forechains and gloomily contemplated the creamy havoc which the *Venture's* bow was creating in the oncoming waves.

I was in no mood for breakfast and lingered on my way. When I finally did enter the saloon it was to the accompaniment of a burst of merriment. Already, I thought, the siren is making hay among the simple-hearted mariners. Rosy and roguish, she sat with eyes a-light and laughter on her lips. A queen, young, lovely and beloved in the midst of an adoring court. At some sally of hers Captain Merrihew was laughing with frank enjoyment, March was haw-hawing with schoolboy completeness and Mr. MacAlpin's eyes held the twinkle of a bright sun on a frosty morning.

"Verra good, verra good, lassie—or I should say, ma'am," rumbled our man of engines.

"Oh, *lassie* is much better, Mr. MacAlpin, if you please. You have no idea how comfortable and homey it sounds to a girl all alone as I am." Could she let no man be? Must she bring even this Scotsman, old enough to be her father, under her spell? Must she continually be cuddling herself in male chivalry like a cat snuggling down in a warm blanket? I could have taken her by her shapely shoulders and shaken her.

"Lassie let it be, then," said Mr. MacAlpin. "'Twill put me in mind o' my ain Janie in Edinburgh. She'll be aboot of an age wi' ye." He studied her through narrowed lids as though she were some new and intriguing form of engine. "But no so bonny," he added judicially.

Nor was Girond proof against her magic. He hovered about her chair in a perfect ecstasy of service. For once even Mon Capitaine ran grave danger of being neglected.

She turned to me. "I haven't had a chance to thank you for the lovely cabin you found for me."

"Your thanks are due Girond for that." I hoped she would notice the stiffness of my tone.

"Oh, I have thanked Girond already. But I must thank you, too. I have told Captain Merry how kind and helpful you have been."

"It is the supercargo's duty, I believe, to care for the comfort of any passengers the ship may carry." I spoke in a low tone. Until I should have a chance to tell him what I knew I did not care to have Captain Merrihew notice the change in my attitude toward Miss

Tempest. She looked at me with an air of bewilderment. Evidently she was unaware that I had discovered her double dealing.

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Lamar, looking more than ever like the damned soul of a perfect gentleman. A rueful countenance for a successful lover to be wearing. Or was it a mask? If so, the disguise was a good one.

"You have not met our first officer, Mr. Lamar, I think, Miss Tempest?" This from Captain Merrihew.

Lamar acknowledged the introduction with the most formal of bows, and she with a modest inclination of her head. For me the situation was intolerable. I could not sit there and she weaving her witcheries about the souls of honest men. Already, I knew, she was snugly curled up in Captain Merrihew's great heart. I had seen her make herself cozy under the Scotsman's protesting wing. March, it stood to reason, would become her abject slave at the crook of her slender finger. Even the faithful Girond's fidelity might not be proof against an appealing look in these lovely and uncanny eyes.

Only Lamar (her master, accomplice or victim, I knew not which) and I were armed by knowledge against her wiles. We knew the cold, calculating brain behind that beautiful face. And I, even knowing what I knew, was I so sure of holding out against the deadly charm of her?

With a muttered excuse I returned to the deck. There is a sedative virtue in the sea's immensity, surely.

As I bathed my eyes in the sight of it, the hateful ferment of my soul was by little and little gentled into a vast and not unagreeable sadness. Looking out into the green far reaching waters, I could no more harbor rancor in my heart than if I had been gazing into the calm eye of God. A drifter, then, as always, I felt content to say with the pious Moslem, "kismet." Let come what may of weal or woe, there is little I may do to hasten or delay it. This time tomorrow I may be sleeping on the sea's floor with a shell-riddled hulk for my casket. Then if my spirit be a sentient thing, how foolish will seem to my ghostly past all this strife and turmoil about so passing a thing as a woman's faithlessness.

My philosophic reveries, over which I was beginning to be a bit complacent, were disturbed by the smart tap of heels along the deck. Marcia Tempest was coming towards me, swaying easily to the gentle roll of the ship and bravely breasting the wind which shipped her uncovered hair into streaming pennons and tugged at her cloak. I steeled my heart and summoned all my resolution to withstand the shock of her beauty. I must meet subtlety with craft. She must not suspect that I suspected. But was I strong enough? Would she not twist me round her finger again as she had done before? No! I was prepared for her now. Or wouldn't she?

"Appearances may be against me. But I cannot think you will not understand—a little?" If only her words wouldn't come back to me that way. Appear-

ances were against her—and more than appearances. And I understood not only a little but too much. Or did I? Could it be that I had wronged her deeply? Heaven knows I was ready to grasp at any straw.

"Johnny Holt," she said, looking at me with hurt in her eyes, "I have done something to offend you. What it is I don't know. But whatever it may be, I am sorry." I wondered if she suspected the true cause of my resentment. No, she couldn't, and still have the hardihood to stand there with that look of penitence. Not even if she were a wily pagan goddess, for her own ends humbling herself to sue for forgiveness at the hands of the stern, self-righteous shepherd lad. I turned away not daring to look longer upon her beauty. And in that instant I knew that should this woman be the Messalina I had called her in my heart—aye, and Delilah, Omphale and a dozen other traitorous ladies welded into one lovely shape—yet would I forgive her. By this I know I loved her.

And so I lied. "No, you have done nothing to offend." Then followed with the truth: "But if you had, a thousand times, I don't think it would make any difference in my feelings toward you."

"And yet—"

"And yet," I burst out, "you've put me in the devil's own pickle. Remember there is a double loyalty I owe Captain Merry. He is my commander and my friend. You hint of dangers, yet you will tell nothing. You pretend to care for him, yet you pledge me not to warn him. In heaven's name, clear up all this mystery."

"I can't. Not now. In a few days, perhaps. I must think. Oh, if you only knew how I wish I could tell you everything and ask you to advise me. But I can't, I can't, I can't." She turned from me biting her lip to control the emotion which threatened to overwhelm her. I stood impotently opening and shutting my hands and struggling against a feeling of utter misery and bewilderment.

"Won't you—can't you trust me a little longer?" It was a choky little voice with a world of pleading in it. I surrendered, horse, foot and guns.

"A little longer—or to the end of time."

A very radiant face it was that turned toward me. "Gracious, I know I must look a perfect fright with my hair blowing in every direction. Let me run down to my cabin for a little minute and then you must show me over the ship."

While she was gone I filled my pipe.

On some page in Nature's book of statutes it is written: "Upon ascending from Avernus or descending from the clouds a woman shall seek the steadying influence of her mirror, and a man the sober comfort of tobacco."

Chapter XIII

WE RUN THE GAUNTLET

THE third night out from St. George's found the *Venture* nosing her way down the South Carolina coast. On her starboard the white line of surf on a low shore cut a white gash in the darkness and the thud and swash of the waves toppling on the beach carried plainly to our ears.

But for the muffled breathing of her engines, throttled down to half speed, there was no other sound, except now and again a grumbling whisper among the seamen gathered at the bulwarks. At midnight, without orders, the watch below had deserted the forecastle to station themselves as volunteer lookouts. A sense of the proximity of the goal and the nearness of the alert goal-keepers thrilled the imagination and tensed the nerves of the most phlegmatic among us. By Captain Merrihew's order officers and crew before nightfall had assumed the white uniforms provided for the actual passage of the blockading fleet. And now I was struck with the wisdom of this precaution.

Against the dull greyish white of the ship's wood-work a man was hardly visible half the length of the deck, whereas a dark uniform against the same back-

ground would have stood out with the bold relief of an ink spot on a white tablecloth. As it was, this phantom ship, manned by its ghostly crew, might have passed undetected within a cable's length of an enemy.

So far our voyage had been without incident. As was the custom among the blockade-running fraternity, each lookout was sent aloft with the promise of a dollar for every sail reported, but if a sail was sighted from the deck before it was called from the masthead the unprofitable watchman was fined five dollars. But even this double-barreled inducement to vigilance had resulted in less than half a score "Sail ho's." On each occasion Captain Merrihew had ordered full steam and a change of course which would drop the stranger ship below the horizon with the greatest possible expedition.

At this time it was the practice of the blockading squadron stationed off Charleston to deploy roughly in three concentric arcs, guiding on the flagship, which alone showed a light. Under the protecting shadow of night the horns of the innermost crescent approached the shore as closely as the draught of the vessels and the guns of the Confederate batteries would permit. The blockade runner then had his choice of alternatives. It was his privilege either to cut through or go around. In the former contingency he must thread a mystic maze of darkened ships without bargeing into any. In the latter case he had only to circumnavigate a wing of the fleet and steam merrily down to shoreward of the innermost vessels of the blockading squad-

ron. Barring going hard aground in shoal water or other accidents he hoped to find himself under the protection of the Southern guns at peep o' day.

Trusting to the *Venture's* shallow draught and Mr. Lamar's knowledge of the coast Captain Merrihew elected to try the long way 'round.

Nevertheless it was a ticklish, breath-taking business, this of navigating shoal waters on a dark night with never a friendly, reassuring wink from a lighthouse or a mournful warning from that pessimist of the sea, the bell buoy. Since the bearings taken at noon there had been nothing to indicate our position except the calculations which Captain Merrihew and Mr. Lamar had checked and rechecked. If these calculations were absolutely correct, our officers knew where we were. If the calculations were out a hair's breadth, daylight might find us anywhere or nowhere at all.

"We'll simply have to smell our way, eh, Mr. Lamar?" Captain Merrihew asked.

"That's about it, sir." The first officer was peering anxiously ahead into the darkness. "Richmond has ordered every lighthouse closed hereabouts. I reckon it's necessary to hamper the enemy's movements, but it's a poor way to welcome a friend."

"A lamp in the window to light the prodigal home would be a deal more comforting," Captain Merrihew assented. "Mr. Holt, go forward and ask Mr. March what the lead shows." I found that efficient young offi-

cer humped over the bows directing the efforts of the leadsmen.

"Three faddom, sir," reported that worthy.

"Right. Heave her in," ordered March, and the heavy weight was deposited dripping on the deck.

"Half a minute till I see what bottom." March hefted the weight and led the way into the saloon where a dim light was burning. He examined the particles clinging to the lead. Amid the dark brown of wet sand I noted some minute black particles.

"Report three fathoms and a speckled bottom to the bridge. If old Lamar knows these waters as well as he says, that ought to help him," said Mr. March cheerfully.

"Speckled bottom," said Mr. Lamar when I'd made my report to the captain. "That's fine. I think I know just about where we are. If we keep her at five knots we ought to be off Sullivan's Island by daybreak."

"How goes it below, Mr. MacAlpin?" Captain Merrihew addressed a plump ghost, somewhat stained with grease and coal dust, which had made its way ponderously up the ladder to the bridge. "All serene in the engine room?"

"Aye, sir, the lads have a full head o' steam up. 'But mind ye,' I war-rns them, 'don't let her blow off. One whoosh from the safety,' I says, 'an' I'll throw the lot o' ye intae the fiery fur-r-nace. So unless ye be Shadracks, Meshacks and Abednegos, don't let me hear the whisper of a whoosh out o' her.' An' ye'll ob-

sairve," continued the engineer, cocking his eye aloft, "there's no mair smoke from her stacks than would come from a pipe 'twixt yer teeth. An' it's Newcastle muck we're burnin', not gude clean Welsh coal. But the Yankee laddies'll have sharp eyes if they catch a keek o' our smoke or so much as a spark this night. 'Tis all in the way ye lay yer coals on. Spread yer coals thin an' careful like a canny housewife butterin' scones an' ye'll hae a fire that'd scorch the diel himsel'—an' no call to be puttin' on yer draughts an' wastin' gude coal up the stacks."

"'Guid gie us gude conceit o' oorsel's,'" Mr. Lamar quoted in my ear.

"Excellent, Mr. MacAlpin," said Captain Merrihew heartily. "And if we go blundering into one of Mr. Lincoln's watchdogs, I dare say you can give us an ounce or so of speed?"

"Rest easy on that score, sir. Just gie us the word, an' if its twelve knots you want ye shall have 'em, or fifteen for that matter." And Mr. MacAlpin descended to the lower regions to harry his firemen and yearn over his engines and anoint their already glistening rods and oozing joints with yet more oil.

The night wore on towards dawn, each passing minute seeming to give another turn to nerves already taut as fiddle strings.

"Chancey work this, eh, Young Holt?" Captain Merrihew inquired. "If our reckoning is correct we are right as rain. If it's a bit out, daylight is likely to find us neatly bottled up with the State of South

Carolina to starboard and a dozen Yankee men-o'-war to larboard."

"And what then, sir?"

"Well, then, there are several clever dodges we can try. One of them is surrender. But I scarcely think we'll do that. If there is a shore battery near we will show the enemy our heels and trust to coming under the protection of its guns before we get a shot below the water line or a shell through our boilers. Failing that we shall have to beach the *Venture*, lash down her safety valve, set her afire in half-a-dozen places and take to the boats."

"Madame presents her compliments and will the gentlemen 'ave coffee. These sandweech Madame 'ave made with her own 'ands." Calm, unruffled, Girond, that prince of stewards, stood with a tray covered by a spotless napkin. The rich bouquet of the coffee struck athwart my nostrils. Gladly we accepted the steaming liquid, clear and heartening as good wine. And the sandwiches, not those fripperies of transparent thinness reminiscent of small talk and four o'clock tea, but great thick slices of bread, plethoric with layers of good honest beef. Let theologians and physiologists dispute as they will as to the dwelling place of man's soul. If you ask me, 'tis no great way from his belt buckle. I know that when you are standing a watch on deck, with the chill of the towards morning mist in your throat and the clammy touch of unseen danger at your heart, nothing warms the soul of a man like a steaming hot cup of coffee or a tot of grog.

And a shivering soul has found the same comfort in a slice of good beef that a shivering body gets from a warm pea-jacket.

"Present my compliments to Miss Tempest and thank her for her thoughtfulness," said Captain Merrihew, extending his empty cup for another go at the silver coffee pot which Girond bore on his tray. "And by the way, carry something forward to Mr. March and down to Mr. MacAlpin."

"Madame 'ave already tol' me that I do so. And she ask may she also send a leetle somesing to the men?"

"Certainly, Girond. Call on the cook to help her and break out a ration of rum for all hands."

"Oui, Mon Capitaine." Girond flitted noiselessly on his errand.

"A girl in a thousand. A girl in ten thousand!" exclaimed Captain Merrihew. "Where most women would be taking to their sal volatile she takes to her bread knife and coffee pot. A brave heart and a great heart in a beautiful body."

Mr. Lamar said nothing. His worn face, expressionless as a threadbare mask, said even less.

It was later, I don't know how much, that we raised a single gleaming point to seaward. "The riding light of the flagship," said Captain Merrihew. The rest of the blockading fleet would be deployed at intervals to either side and behind that lonely star. In all probability we were even now creeping down a long line of darkened silent ships, and at any moment might blunder into one a bit in advance of her fellows.

Slowly the light drew nearer until it lay abeam and perhaps a half mile distant.

Captain Merrihew, with lips glued to the speaking tube, called softly: "Mr. MacAlpin, reduce speed. Just give us steerage way. Then stand by for full steam ahead when I give you the word."

Instantly there was a slacking away of the *Venture's* speed. In the darkness and stillness of the night she lay like a log, rising and falling to the gentle ground swell. Already a cold wan light was spilling over the sky.

A voice somewhere, seemingly at my elbow, sang out. The words were unintelligible. Captain Merrihew sprang to the speaking tube. "Full speed ahead," he shouted. "Give her all she's got." A great column of smoke, black and solid as the trunk of an oak, rose from each of the *Venture's* stacks. A shower of sparks shot high into the air and fell hissing into the sea. A rain of particles, hot as the ashes from a volcano, rattled upon the deck. In a flurry of white foam the *Venture* leaped forward with the suddenness of a horse under an unexpected rowelling of the spur.

A blinding flash of lightning and simultaneously a stupefying crash of thunder. I felt a dull shock in the small of my back as though I had been smitten with a soft pillow wielded by a giant arm. The atmosphere opened like a book and slammed violently shut again. A second flash to shoreward and an instant later a report as the shell exploded.

From somewhere out of the unseen there rose a

strident voice bellowing commands and the clanking of an anchor chain being heaved in. A sharp hiss and some infernal object hurtled toward us trailing behind it a thick tail of sparks. Instinctively I threw up my arm to ward off this approaching messenger of death and destruction. A sharp crack, directly overhead, and a cluster of stars. It was a rocket.

"That was to point out our position to the rest of them." Captain Merrihew's quiet voice fell like a benediction on my jangled nerves. "But I doubt if they will fire for fear of winging some of their own fellows."

From the direction of the flagship a second rocket soared and two others far to the right and left of the first. A shell, evidently a random venture, sent up a harmless column of water far astern of us.

Somewhere on shore a light climbed up the sky, hovered an instant, rapidly descended, and disappeared.

"That would be the battery on Sullivan's Island, I reckon," said Mr. Lamar, who during the night had betrayed signs of nervousness, but now that the waiting was over seemed as cool as Captain Merrihew himself.

"Mr. Holt, show that lantern under the bucket in the direction of that light on shore. But careful. Don't let a gleam escape to seaward."

Carefully tilting up the bucket at an angle and steadying the lantern in its interior I directed its beam as well as I could judge toward the spot where the light had been.

Two lights now appeared, one seemingly on the

beach, the other a short distance inland. "There go the guiding lights," Mr. Lamar thrust the helmsman aside and seized the wheel himself. He swung the ship's head over sharply to bring the two lights into alignment.

"Keep your lead going lively, Mr. March," Captain Merrihew shouted.

There was a double report of two guns fired almost simultaneously. A beating of wings as though some great bird was flying over the ship—a bird that whimpered weirdly as it flew. The other shell, falling close to the ship, exploded with a smothered boom and sent a sheet of spray onto the bridge.

"By Jove, the beggars are getting our range! Lie low, men," Captain Merrihew called to the group on the forward deck. How gladly would I have surrendered my post of honor on the bridge for even so frail a shelter as the wooden bulwarks afforded.

"Three fathoms and shoaling rapidly, sir," March sang out.

As though his hail had been a signal, there followed a terrific explosion. My knees gave way and I was down, clinging despairingly to the taffrail. I shut my eyes, and hunching my shoulders, awaited the inevitable. After eons of cowering in a black and bottomless terror my benumbed brain registered an impression of something I had seen ages ago, the last thing, in fact, I had seen before shutting my eyes. It was a sheet of lightning stabbed through and through with hot red bands of flame. And the lightning had not

flared from the sea but from the land. It had been the Confederate batteries opening on our pursuers.

Hastily I crawled to my feet. The stark silence, which had followed the terrifying outburst of sound, still prevailed. My eons must have lasted less than five seconds. Had my companions noticed my cowardice?

"Full speed astern. Let go the anchor." A furious churning and the rattle of the chains running out. Again a darting of flame and a crash from the shore batteries. This time their thunder was sweeter to my ears than a mother's lullaby. There was no reply from the sea. The questing hounds had drawn off. The *Venture's* boilers blew off with a great hissing of steam. It was as if the tired ship were heaving a sigh of relief.

A creaking of oarlocks and a voice: "On bode thah, what ship?"

"The *Venture* of London, three days out from St. George's," Captain Merrihew replied. "Won't you come aboard?"

"Sorry, suh, I'd like to but I can't. Colonel's waitin' to heah who you are."

"You are from the battery, I take it. Will you present the captain's compliments to the Colonel and thank him for his assistance. And by the way, can't I send a case or two of brandy to your mess?"

"By George, Captain, you just could. We're drier than powder ovah thah now. Mark it for Battery Beauregard, suh. Mark it plain. And now I must be

getting back with my repote. The guard boat will be down directly to put you through quarantine and worry you generally with their damned foolishness. Good-bye, suh. Give way, boys."

In the doorway of the saloon I came upon Marcia Tempest, fresh, rosy and smiling as if she had arisen from a good night's rest.

"Oh, Johnny Holt, didn't you just love it?"

I gaped at her in amazement. "Where were you all the time?" I asked.

"Out there in the back. What do you call it—the stern? I wanted dreadfully to come up on the bridge but I thought I might be in the way."

"But weren't you afraid?"

"No." She glanced up at the bridge. "I knew he would bring us through safely." Which of the two was *he*, I wondered? Captain Merrihew or the first officer? "And you were out there all through the firing?" I asked.

"Of course. I only stepped down to my cabin a minute—to do up my hair."

Words, like wine and men and other things, are subject sometimes to a "sea change," and are so affected by the climatic conditions as to alter completely their character. This word "directly" for an example. In busy London "directly" is a quick energetic fellow, who puffs and blows and perspires in his haste to be all over the shop at once. When "directly" finds himself within sound of Bow Bells he means "now" "immediately," "at once," "without delay,"

"instantly," "right away." Oh, my, yes, "directly" is a pushing, impatient enough fellow when he's bounding about Paul's Churchyard or racing up and down Ludgate Hill.

But let "directly" cross the blue water and settle in South Carolina or Georgia or Virginia—anywhere to the sunny side of a certain historic line drawn many year ago by Messrs. Mason and Dixon—and you'd never know him for the same word at all. "Directly" has become a good-natured, easy-going, procrastinating chap. He now means the very reverse of "at once." He is first cousin to the Latin-American *mañana*.

During my brief stay in Charleston I more than once barked my impatient shins against this distinction between two words which are spelled exactly alike and yet convey totally different ideas. I learnt this distinction in time and am setting down my discoveries for the benefit of travelers and students of comparative philology.

More than once I burst into the somnolent atmosphere of a Charleston shipping office waving a huge packet of bills of lading, to be greeted with a reassuring, "Directly, suh, directly." After five minutes I would again call attention to my presence, when some dignified old gentleman would interrupt his conversation with an equally impressive old crony long enough to say, "Directly, suh, directly." At long last it dawned upon my intelligence that the word actually and in all good faith meant "after a while."

It was in this Pickwickian sense that the emissary from Battery Beauregard had promised that the guard boat would be along "directly."

In the silence of first dawn we had heard to seaward the clanking of chains as the forward ships of the blockading squadron weighed anchor to seek their daytime positions beyond the range of the shore batteries. Morning disclosed a beach dotted here and there with scraggy palmettos and a marshy looking hinterland. A few gray figures climbed to the parapet of some earthworks which we took to be Battery Beauregard, and waved their hats to us in friendly greeting. Otherwise we were ignored even by the distant Federal fleet which had lately been so solicitous of our welfare.

Eight bells had sounded before a valetudinarian tugboat flying the stars and bars of the Confederacy puffed alongside and deposited on our decks two military men and a short, thick-set old fellow with an unmistakably seafaring cut to his jib.

"I'm Majah Rainey, Provost Marshal, and this is Doctah Gilliard," said one of the officers to Captain Merrihew. "And this is Cap'n Bone"—indicating the ancient mariner. "He will pilot you in."

The red tape proved to be a very short length and was speedily disentangled. The doctor having satisfied himself that we carried no Yellow Jack was easily prevailed upon to drink a glass to a continuance of our present excellent health. In this benevolent enterprise he was ably seconded by Major Rainey and Cap-

tain Bone. Thereupon the guardboat departed with the Doctor and Major while Captain Bone ascended the bridge.

Past the sandy shores of Sullivan's Island we steamed, and into Charleston Harbor.

"Ovah thah on the starbode is Fote Moultrie," explained the pilot. "And right acrost is Fote Sumter. They ain't a lot left o' Sumter above ground. First our folks smashed her back in '61 and the damn Yankees been takin' pot shots at her ever since. But she's got a garrison in her still an' they say she's safe as a church inside."

"I'd hardly think so," remarked Mr. Lamar. Its breached and crumpled walls certainly gave the fort the appearance of a complete and melancholy ruin.

"Yes, suh, they's two or three companies stationed thah now and Cap'n Mitchell he's in command and he swears he can hold her through hell and high water."

"It would be a pretty serious business for us if the Yankees silenced Sumter or took it—lying as it does right there in the mouth of the harbor," said the first officer.

"Well, it would disturb yo' trade some, I reckon."

"I wasn't thinking so much about that," replied Mr. Lamar. "You see I'm Southern, myself."

"I thought you kinda talked like home folks—only you ain't South Carolina."

"No, Virginia. I've been in England and until I can get a chance for a ship, I'm doing what I can in this line."

"And a damn good line it is, suh. I reckon ole Gen'l Lee will be powerful glad to get what you've got for him in yo' hold."

"But suppose the Yankee fleet did get past the outer forts, what would they run up against?" Lamar asked.

"Some mighty funny little Yankee traps—layovers to catch meddlers, we call 'em." The old man chuckled. "Ole Gen'l Lee, he planted some right hot potatoes in this old harbor when he was in command of the Department. And since then old Gen'l Beauregard's been settin' up nights studyin' out a lot o' newfangled do-funnies. Right along thah"—his pointing finger described a line across the harbor from Fort Sumter to Sullivan's Island—"there's something like a big fish net, big enough to catch ole Jonah's whale in. I'm goin' to take you all right through it, but if you didn't know the combination you'd find that doggoned ole net draggin' on your keel and a-tanglin' your paddle wheels in no time. And a little beyond that old Gen'l Beauregard's done planted every kind of torpedo anybody ever heard tell of and a lot o' new doodads nobody ain't never heard of 'cept him. An' right spang acrost the channel up thah todes Castle Pinckney they's a row o' piles sunk so's they are just covered at low tide. No boat drawin' any mo' water than a bateau could pass them piles 'thout rippin' her guts out.

"Right now, gentlemen, you are floatin' over Kingdom Come. But ole Billy Bone's been pilotin' ships in an' out o' hyah for fifty year an' I reckon he ain't goin' to let you come to no harm."

For the first time since I had known him, Mr. Lamar became animated. His face had lost much of its hag-ridden expression. His eyes lighted up as they followed the old pilot's finger plotting out the defensive dispositions of the harbor. The interest of a naval man, keen on his profession, had banished for the moment the devils that possessed him, I took it. Time and again he would request Captain Bone to repeat some bit of information or enlarge upon it and the garrulous old fellow was flattered by the interest of his audience and spread himself—not disdaining, I'm afraid, to pull the long bow.

I do not believe, for example, that he was "cap'n Billy" to "ole Gen'l Beauregard," or quite so deep in that commander's confidence, as was to be inferred from his narrative. Well mined as Charleston Harbor may have been, it would scarcely have been strewn with the myriad infernal machines which, according to our informant, lurked beneath its blue and placid waters, and I am still skeptical concerning a mine of tremendous size and filled with a newly discovered explosive of terrific force. This mine, as I recall it, was affectionately known as "Jessie Belle," probably a corruption of "Jezebel."

If half the things that Captain Billy Bone told us about Charleston Harbor were true, I don't blame the Federal fleet for preferring to carry on the argument at long range.

Chapter XIV

OLD DIXIE'S BOTTOM DOLLARS

CHARLESTON in sixty-four. The perfect picture of the ugliness of War—war stripped of its pomps and vanities down to its own grim naked hideousness. I had not expected to find it a gay or a peaceful city, but the abomination of its desolation was beyond anything I could have imagined. Three years of intermittent bombardment had by degrees reduced the habitable area of the town to a slowly shrinking island in a Dead Sea of lifeless thoroughfares and battered ruin. Those streets which yet remained unscathed were eloquent of the one-time beauty of the city—one of the oldest and the richest on the Northern Continent. Truly the glory of her house had departed. My first sight of Charleston was like looking upon a woman's face not long since famous for its beauty but now horribly marred by some frightful accident.

Strolling along the Battery, Charleston's Mayfair, I tried to repeople the great houses, now sleeping behind closed shutters. Here, I said, lived some wealthy planter, lord of an estate big as a small principality—surrounded by a feudal retinue of black retainers. The next house had sheltered a reigning belle, the toast of

the town, whose train of anxious suitors had kept the old brass door-knocker rat-tatting from morning till night. I conjured up scenes of balls and parties and weddings when these old homes blazed with light from every window and the carriages rumbled in endless procession along the esplanade which skirted the harbor.

Where were the sleek fat horses that drew those carriages, now? Dragging guns through the mud of Virginia and Tennessee probably. And the belles and bloods and brides and beaux who rode in those carriages?

There is always something depressing about an empty house, something sinister ever. But infinitely worse is it to walk through entire streets of homes from which has fled the cheerful soul of human occupancy. In comparison with some of the other sections of the city the shells had treated the Battery with consideration. Most of the houses had escaped damage. Only here and there one had been reduced to a battered hulk. But all were deserted and in gardens, long untended, rank weeds grown insolent as newly enfranchised *sans-culottes*, threatened with extinction the flowers which still strove bravely to assert their aristocratic prerogative of beauty. Meeting Street and King Street, the business center of the city, had suffered most. Everywhere there rose gaunt chimneys standing alone like the masts of sunken ships. But even here the shells had played queer pranks in their capricious selection of victims. Here would be a house standing intact while its neighbor lay crushed into a shapeless mass of brick

and mortar. A little further on there would be a house seemingly untouched, until a closer examination disclosed walls breached with ghastly holes as though gnawed by giant rats.

One house, I remember in particular, had been shorn of its facade so that its interior lay bare. Many of the rooms had been stripped of their furnishings; but one, evidently the nursery, remained much as it had been. Scattered about the floor were various toys, and a doll slept peacefully in her tiny cradle. I wondered why the little orphan had been abandoned. I hoped it was not because the little mother who had tucked her into bed no longer needed her. I trusted that the shell which had wrought such havoc had not left that doll an orphan in very truth.

I remember a church, or what was left of it—the Church of the Huguenots, I think it was called. Two great breaches over the altar showed where the shells had entered, completely wrecking the interior. The pews, smashed to kindling wood, were sprinkled over with bright jewels of many colors from the shattered saints and angels who had adorned the windows. Prayer books and hymnals scattered in the aisles, fluttered their weather-stained leaves. While I was attempting to decipher the memorial tablets on the walls—most of them were in rather archaic French—an old colored man approached me.

"Right thar, sah," he pointed with a tremulous mahogany forefinger, "is whar a shell killed Miss Sallie Holcomb." He seemed to take it for granted that I

should know so great a personage as Miss Sallie. "She was kneelin' befo' de high altar wid de big communion cup in her hands when de firs' shell 'sploded. I always comed to church wid Miss Sallie for to tote her prayer book and parasol an' I was settin' up in de gallery yonder. Dar warden't many folks in de church 'cause hit was of a Friday an' not Sunday and dey was mos'ly ladies. When dat ole shell lit dey all runned out an' I runned down whar Miss Sallie was at on de flo'. De parson was tryin' for to lif' her up and dey was blood on his white surplus an' dey blood on de flo' all commingled wid de wine. Miss Sallie jes' opened her eyes once an' she seed me an' says, 'Uncle Isom, tell Mama I ain't hurt much.' An' me and de parson carried her out an' she was daid."

As I turned again into the street I found myself wondering that I was less moved by the old negro's simple tale than by the mute evidence of destruction all about me.

Undoubtedly we should hold a human life more precious than the work of men's hands. Yet there is something more terrible and pitiful about the mutilated corpse of a house than a shell mangled body. There is more of the tragedy of sudden, violent and unlovely death. Perhaps this is because the thing of flesh and blood is quickly hidden in the kindly earth, while the thing of wood and masonry continues to stand, lifeless but unburied, staring upon the passer-by from hollow sightless eyes. The bloodiest battlefield, I am sure,

could not have given me the hump as did the sight of that doomed city.

That is one side of the medal, death, desolation and despair. Yet there was another side.

Marcia Tempest, immediately on her arrival in Charleston, had vanished into the keeping of friends who lived at the habitable end of Meeting Street, and it was by her invitation that I was given a glimpse of family life in the besieged city. This family, Huguenin by name, inhabited one of those tall three-deckers so characteristic of Charleston. A long narrow house which presented its shoulder to the street, and whose privacy was secured by a six- or seven-foot garden wall, pierced by a wicket gate, locked at night and fitted with a bell pull whereby the visitor announced his presence. From a front garden, riotously abloom with color, rose giant wistaria vines, thick through as pythons, which climbed from one to the other of the triple tier of deep verandahs, shading them against the sun with gorgeous purple awnings of blossom. It was in this home-like setting that Captain Merrihew and I were introduced to the Huguenin family circle. It consists of "the Colonel" (a tall and still slender relic of the Mexican War, white-haired, and fierce eyed and grumblingly resentful of having been relegated to "damned quartermastah corps, suh"), his tiny and gentle lady wife and two handsome daughters. There was a son, absent now with the Army of Northern Virginia, and there had been another. But for him

the ladies wore black—not the rustling and becoming weeds we associate with fashionable mourning, but a greeny, desponding black of home-made dyes superimposed on the brighter colors of happier days.

Dinner brought the war home to me as vividly as did the ruined and desolated streets. We sat about a mahogany table and were served by an old colored butler with the stately mien of an archbishop. The china was of egg-shell thinness and the silver bore the hall marks of London smiths dead and gone a century and more. But tablecloth and napkins had long since gone to the hospitals to serve as bandages, and our "linen" was of the coarsest cotton. The piece de resistance at dinner was a piece of fat pork, reinforced by the inevitable rice of Carolina, black-eyed peas and a salad of turnip tops. But coarse as was the fare it was unbelievably appetizing—made so by the transfiguring art of Charleston cookery, which is a blend of the best of French and English with a dash of the black magic with which a little pickaninny destined to become a cook is endowed by some fairy godmother. But no magic, black or white, could make coffee of the burnt bran, sweetened with molasses.

After the ladies had withdrawn the Colonel produced a bottle. "I'm sorry, gentlemen, I can offer you no wine, but good corn liquor is not to be despised. Pour hearty." I took him at his word and poured hearty. Captain Merrihew and a young cavalryman, a relative of the Huguenins, were more modest in their pouring. I learned why with the first fiery mouthful,

that brought tears to my eyes and blistered the lining of my throat.

The cavalryman gave me a cheerful wink and a grin as he tossed off his glass. "Corn whiskey," he confided, "wants a lot of getting used to." He was about my own age and I took to him enormously. While the Colonel and Captain Merrihew discussed politics, he regaled me with talk more to my taste. From him I heard tales of the University of Virginia which made Oxford seem a dull and uninteresting place by comparison. Whether there was any Latin or Greek taught at this institution the deponent saith not, but certainly there were some tremendous drinking bouts and some tall stakes won and lost at cards or on the turf. There were some famous rags and hoaxes and now and again a duel conducted with all due form and ceremony and even some blood-letting. But best of all was his description of the life of a "buttermilk ranger" (that's what the envious infantry call us fellows lucky enough to have horses to ride on, he explained). To hear him tell it, war was even better than the University, and to that reckless young devil I believe it was. He stirred my impressionable young soul with tales of night raids behind the enemy lines and back before cock crow. He had followed Jeb Stuart in more than one charge and described how that picturesque commander went into battle, his long hair streaming behind him, waving his cloak and singing at the top of his lungs—

"Ef you want to have a good time, jine the cavalry."

From him I heard the exploits of Fitz Lee and with

him I rode with old Jubal Early on his famous foray into Washington. He made me drunk with visions and ashamed.

As the evening progressed and the bottle waned low, Colonel Huguenin had asked him: "Why don't you unbutton your coat? It's infernally hot and there aren't any ladies present." And he had replied: "To tell you the truth, sir, I haven't any shirt on. My last one wore out months ago."

Do you wonder I felt ashamed—and fat and soft as a Michaelmas goose? Beside this hard-bitten veteran, as young in years as myself, I was but a schoolboy, shipped away to play at adventure.

I was as one attired for the marriage feast who has unintentionally blundered into a house of mourning. I was as one dressed in cricket flannels who stands aside to let a regiment in field equipment pass on its purposeful way. "We have robbed the cradle and the grave to fill our ranks," Mr. Ravenel had said. Was it not so? I had seen on the streets hardly a youth of sixteen who wasn't in uniform, and I had met many a gray-clad figure whose shoulders were already beginning to stoop under the weight of years. Old men and boys, the war was sparing neither. "Poor old Dixie's bottom dollars," as Henley called them.

Those hours at table between the old war horse of a colonel straining at his quartermaster halter, and his high-hearted young kinsman wrought a change in me. These two symbolized for me a brave people—how does it go?—

"... facing fearful odds

For the ashes of their fathers and the altars of
their gods."

I felt I ought to be apologizing to them for my sheltered way of life. There was need of explanation why I stood idle while they—

Even to this day the political aspects of the struggle are beyond me, and I have long ago come to agree with Mr. Lamar that on questions of politics it is futile to reason in terms of right and wrong. Either you *feel* one way or the other or you must remain indifferent. As it happened, I *felt* I had become as hot-headed a rebel as though I had been born in Charleston and nurtured on States' Rights from my earliest days. It was in vain I reasoned with myself that it was no quarrel of mine. Somehow it *was* my fight. I'll make the return voyage to St. George's, I resolved, and then the *Venture* shall lose a supercargo and the South shall gain a soldier. Thereafter I felt better and could look my host and the world in the eye again.

Chapter XV

I FEEL THE NEED OF BRANDY

FOR the first time I found my duties other than a sinecure. Early morning saw me on the docks and in and out of shipping offices. Evening found me dog weary and fit only for my bunk, where in defiance of tropic heat and man-eating mosquitoes, I slept the sleep of the just.

What time I had to give to the problems that beset me I gave, but it was not much. In spite of my suspicions of Mr. Lamar, I discovered, oddly enough, that it was impossible to dislike the man. As for my feelings toward Marcia Tempest, they defied analysis. I had every reason to believe that neither he nor she was dealing fairly with Captain Merrihew. Between the two there was some secret understanding, if not an actual intrigue. That was beyond question. Yet for neither the man nor the girl could I entertain the complete distrust which would have been perfectly natural under the circumstances. What explanation Miss Tempest had given to Captain Merrihew for her presence aboard the *Venture* I did not know, but could easily imagine. It would be one that any man would swallow with relish. To the rest of the ship's company

she was merely a passenger. In those days the only liners plying between Southern ports and the outside world were blockade runners, and lady passengers were not unusual.

As for my resolution to confide my suspicions to Captain Merrihew, that was off again. The tacit confirmation of my pledge of secrecy had sealed my lips as far as Marcia Tempest was concerned. And I saw no way of discussing the matter of the first officer, without betraying her confidence. I was back where I started. A young and inexperienced father-confessor embarrassed with a burden of secret knowledge he gladly would have laid down.

A hundred times I cursed myself for an overconscientious fool. Why not make a clean breast of the whole damnable business to Captain Merrihew and let him decide what was best to be done? Whatever the consequences, I would be doing the right thing. The path of duty lay plain before me. But did it? I was beginning to realize what Mr. Lamar had meant by divided loyalties. I was ready to do right, if only someone or something would tell me what *was* right. If I could only be sure that Mr. Lamar was an unmitigated villain and that Marcia Tempest was an unprincipled adventuress.

Tout comprendre est tout pardonner. But here was I understanding nothing, yet ready to forgive everything. For the hundredth time I shrugged my shoulders and gave it up.

Nevertheless I had determined to keep a close watch

on the movements of our first officer, and my observations had resulted only in mystifying me still further. It seemed to me that the air of Charleston had worked a change in him, given him a new lease on life. Not that he had lost aught of his habitual gravity, but he had less of the hunted look about him and had even developed a mild case of sociability. He was the last man in the world I would have expected to find enjoyment in the society of the garrulous old pilot, Cap'n Billy Bone. Yet on several occasions he had set out early in the morning in the latter's yawl and from the dock I could see their sail dodging aimlessly about the harbor. I understood, too, from casual remarks of Mr. Lamar himself that he had made acquaintances among the officers at Battery Beauregard and had more than once been a guest at their mess.

One evening coming aboard rather late I rapped at the door of the first officer's cabin with the thought of having a bit of a chin before bed. In response to his invitation to enter I opened the door. Mr. Lamar was seated at the table with some papers spread before him.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Holt. Come in."

I noted with some surprise a man stretched in the bunk snoring lustily. On the floor beside him lay a pair of army boots.

"You remember Major Rainey, the provost marshal?" The first officer nodded in the direction of the sleeper. "I'm afraid he's a little 'how come you so.'" He waved his hand toward a brandy bottle on the table.

"Poor devil, I guess good brandy is a rare treat to him these days. Want to see something curious?"

He had before him a chart, marked here and there in red ink. "Know what it is?" I shook my head. "A plan of the defenses of Charleston. The major took it from a Federal spy he captured this afternoon. I reckon it was indiscreet of him to show it to me, but he's an easy-going fellow and he knew I'd be interested. In fact I've been helping him in a little secret service work of one sort or another. But of course you won't say anything about his having shown me these papers? I expect the powers that be would give him an awful wiggling."

Naturally I promised to respect his confidence. Particularly as my curiosity was thoroughly aroused and I was anxious to hear more of the matter.

"So he caught the chap red-handed?" I asked.

"I should say so," Lamar responded. "Look here." He passed me a thin sheet of paper covered with small but very legible script. Fortunately I am able to give its contents verbatim for the reason that a copy of this same letter came into my possession some time later and is before me as I write:

REAR ADMIRAL S. F. DUPONT,
Commanding South Atlantic Blockading Squadron;
Sir:

In pursuance of instructions I have thoroughly examined both land defenses of the city and the obstructions in the harbor. I have been fortunate enough to gain the

confidence of an officer on General Beauregard's staff who has talked to me with the utmost freedom. Through his good offices I have likewise been introduced to certain officers in the various forts and have had opportunity of making personal observations of the utmost value. I feel sure that neither the officers mentioned nor anyone else suspects me and that the information given, whether inadvertently or otherwise, is correct.

The rebel authorities have with great cleverness spread highly exaggerated reports concerning the formidable nature of the obstructions which guard the channels in the harbor. They make a great display of activity in inspecting and renewing the mines, torpedoes, etc., which are supposed to make navigation extremely hazardous. Even the blockade runners are issued minute instructions as to the course to be pursued and these instructions are changed from time to time. Last year the commander of a foreign war vessel, as you perhaps know, was conveyed about the harbor in a small boat and its submarine defenses were explained to him. Doubtless his report has done much to strengthen the general belief in the effectiveness of the precautions taken against a naval assault.

Several nights ago I had opportunity of visiting a number of the "mines" in a rowboat. All the mines I examined, to the number of twenty-five, proved to be empty kegs. As further support of my belief that most, if not all, of the obstructions are equally harmless I may cite the fact that the blockade runners habitually leave the harbor by night and I have been unable to learn of a single mishap. From observation of the course taken by the guard boat at all hours of the day and night in visiting the various forts and meeting blockade runners, I am firmly convinced that the main channel is entirely free of obstructions. [Here follows some highly technical, and, to me incomprehensible, information as to the condition and armament of the forts.]

Only today I was fortunate enough to gain access to the morning reports submitted by the commanding officers of the troops in and around Charleston. The enemy strength is as follows:

| | CHARLES- TON | MORRIS ISLAND | SULLIVAN'S ISLAND | JAMES ISLAND |
|-----------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Infantry | 462 | 612 | 204 | 1184 |
| Artillery | 235 | 289 | 726 | 1569 |
| Cavalry | 153 | 26 | 228 | 153 |
| | <hr/> 850 | <hr/> 927 | <hr/> 1158 | <hr/> 2906 |
| | | | TOTAL 5841 | |

The message bore no signature. But in the lower left-hand corner appeared the letters "2R" followed by the figure "3."

As I laid the letter down I noticed that my hand was trembling as though I had been handling a thing pregnant with death—a deadly poison, for example, or an explosive of terrific power. Between the matter-of-fact lines of the report I read the story of the spy, walking daily among his enemies, his hours haunted by the fear of detection and the swift and merciless fate to follow. And I read other things. I realized the disaster to the Southern cause which might well have resulted had this business-like message reached the Federal fleet. I could picture the council of war hastily summoned in the Admiral's cabin. They would be grouped around this very chart that lay on the table before me. The Admiral would issue his orders and there would be a great pulling of oars as the boats darted away from the flagship bearing captains back to

their vessels. There would be breathless activity aboard the ships of the fleet and in the Federal trenches ashore. Then one day or perhaps one night the skies would open and a storm of screaming shells and hissing grapeshot would burst over Charleston. The already gutted houses would go crashing down, and new paths of ruin would be ploughed. Homes that stood unharmed tonight would on the morrow be the crumbling tombs of many whom they had sheltered. I thought of the old negro with his tale of a woman's blood that had wetted the steps of the high altar, and of the orphan doll I had seen sleeping in her cradle. And this sheet of paper I had held in my hand would have been the force that set free a blind and soulless fury to walk the streets, sparing neither age nor sex nor innocence.

I raised my eyes to find Mr. Lamar's gaze fixed upon me from across the table.

"And if it had gotten through?" I asked.

He smiled. No, it wasn't a smile. It was the grin of a soul in torment when fiends are tearing at its vitals. I was so startled that I could simply stare at him in amazement.

"It would be the death blow of the Confederacy. If this report is true—and I don't doubt that it is—you see how valuable such information would be to those people out yonder. Here is Charleston lying practically at the mercy of the enemy. A determined attack could not fail. The moral effect produced in the North by the fall of Charleston, the very cradle of secession, would be tremendous. As for the South, one more

port would be closed. Only Wilmington would remain, unless we count Galveston, which is too far from the center of things to be of much use."

"And the spy—what will become of him?" I asked.

"A drum-head court martial and a provost guard with a rope. There can be no other end to his story." He hunched his shoulders as though the warm breeze, which stirred the curtain at the open port, had turned suddenly cold. "Ugly business, war. Butcher's work at best and hangman's work all too often. It's not a pretty way to go, at the end of a rope. He's some young chap, probably. Out of West Point or Annapolis with dreams of wearing stars on his shoulders some day, or at worst, meeting an honorable end in battle surrounded by his comrades. And now he's come to the end of it all. And he's got to face it alone."

Mr. Lamar's voice had sunk to a husky whisper. His lips twisted horribly. "God Almighty's curse on the old men who made this war—whichever side they are on. They lie snug in their beds this night while that youngster is waiting in his cell with his ears strained for the tramp of the provost guard. And tomorrow they will gather in their councils like old gray-beard ghouls to plan fresh sacrifices of youth and life and hope. And unborn generations will be taught to venerate these bloody old men as patriots." He drew his hand wearily across his forehead. "But why should I curse them? They are no worse than the princes and proconsuls of all ages who have decreed human sacrifices to their own greater glory. They are but the

blind instruments of some force mightier than themselves and they do after the manner of their kind. They are pawns in the game, even as you and I. But what's the use of the game and who or what's behind it? Mr. MacAlpin calls it Predestination. The Greeks called it Destiny. St. Paul has something to say about the evil I would not, that I do. Have some brandy."

I did have some. I felt the need of it.

Chapter XVI

OFF AGAIN

THE *Venture's* own mother wouldn't have known her. The men who cheered her off the ways at Laird's at Birkenhead where she was built, would never have recognized their handiwork. Low in the water she had always been; now she seemed to be actually sinking under the load of cotton bales she carried. Cotton worth two pence the pound on the dock in Charleston and as many shillings in Liverpool, filled the hold almost to the exclusion of food and stores for the ship's company. Cotton that represented bread and bacon to the hungry mill workers of Lancashire and powder and guns to the Confederacy was piled high on every available inch of deck space. Gone were the *Venture's* graceful lines and with them, I feared, her speed and even her seaworthiness. From the dock where I stood in the gathering twilight she appeared an unwieldy floating island of brown bagging. Marcia Tempest, delighted at the prospect of leaving the gloomy city, had emerged from her seclusion and was already aboard. My papers were in order and all that remained was final inspection, which we were to undergo at the hands of our acquaintance Major Rainey,

the provost marshal. This officer now strolled up accompanied by a sergeant and several men.

"Howdye, Mr. Holt. Your papahs all correct, I reckon?"

"I believe so, sir," I replied, handing him the documents which he examined casually. "Only one passenger, I see, a lady, British subject. Got to search you for stowaways though. All right, boys." The sergeant and his men disappeared below. Presently the sergeant returned. "Caught one fellow, Major," he reported. The capture proved to be a gangling country youth in the ragged uniform of a private. Fear seemed to have deprived him of the few wits that nature had bestowed upon him and he stood breathing hard with his eyes starting from his pale unshaven face.

"I warn't trying to skedaddle. Honest to God I warn't, Cap'n." He was not intentionally demoting Major Rainey. It was merely that Cap'n was the highest rank of which he could conceive. "I jest laid down on one of them air cotton bales to take a little rest and dropped plumb off to sleep. You ain't goin' to shoot me are you, Cap'n? You wouldn't go and do that? I got a ole pappy an' a ole mammy that'd jest nacherly die ef—"

"Go on, boy. Nobody's going to shoot you," the Major said. "Take him along, sergeant."

"What will they do to him?" I asked when the deserter had been led away by the sergeant and his men.

"Put him in the guard house a while and maybe brand him in the hand with a hot iron," Major Rainey replied. "They won't shoot him, that's certain. Men are too valuable these days."

I could not repress a shudder. Of course branding is a slight punishment compared with standing up to a firing squad—the usual penalty for desertion in time of war among all civilized nations. Yet somehow the searing of human flesh with hot iron seemed even more barbarous than the blotting out of a life. There was about it a suggestion of the mediæval torture chamber that set my teeth on edge. However, *c'est la guerre*. A useful phrase, that of our French friends. It covers a multitude of sins.

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Holt, and good luck." The major shook me by the hand. "And give my best to Mr. Lamar. I never met a pleasanter fellow or one I took to more. For a quiet man I never saw one who could be better company." So I thought, too, in a way. But I was surprised to hear Major Rainey express such an opinion, good-natured lover of a strong bottle and a strong story that he was. Mr. Lamar must be a more adaptable person than I have given him credit for being, I thought.

The moon would set at ten o'clock, but long before that hour the *Venture* was feeling her way cautiously down the harbor. Cap'n Billy Bone was on the bridge directing her course and for once the old pilot was silent. His venerable beard rose and fell to the rhythmic motion of his jaws upon the tobacco which he tore

from time to time from a well nibbled plug. His old eyes were intent on guiding signs invisible to mine. Whether the unseen dangers that lurked on every hand were real or imaginary, Cap'n Bill either believed in their existence implicitly or else he was a finished actor. By half after ten we lay in the channel, with the dark mass of Sumter a-stern of us, waiting for the tide which would be at the full in another thirty minutes. Cap'n Bill Bone, preparing to go over the side, was giving some final words of warning to Captain Merrihew and Mr. Lamar.

"You goin' to find it a right smart harder job to git out o' hyar than it was to git in," the old man was saying. "Cause the Yankees they don't know what night you are aimin' to come in or which direction you comin' in from. But they knows you're hyar and they knows you goin' to come rompin' out like a bat out o' hell the first dark night after you're loaded. And don't think they don't know that tonight's the night. Usually when they's expectin' company to come callin' they has a boat's crew on guard right spang in the channel. Ef I was you an' I happened *acc-i-dentally* to run that boat down I wouldn't wait to pick none of 'em up. An' ef I was to read in the paper that some of 'em had gone and got drowned I wouldn't cry any hardly at all."

At eleven o'clock we were under way again, steering by the riding light of the blockaders' flagship, which March, who had the forward lookout, judged to be about two miles off shore. Under half steam we

crept forward. Again watch below and watch on deck alike were on the *qui vive*. Men stretched at length on the cotton bales strained their eyes against a darkness solid to the touch almost. The single star burning at the mast-head of the flagship was the only visible thing in the black void ahead. Up in the bow with March, I could feel my eyes protruding like a snail's, in their effort to penetrate the night, but a blind man would have made as effective a lookout. My overactive imagination, however, was busy. Every other moment it was conjuring up dark phantom ships lying across our bow ready to rake us fore and aft with a withering broadside. Time after time I clutched my companion by the elbow and pointed a shaking finger at nothing, until finally in exasperation he whispered me to "stow it." Thereafter I kept myself to myself. When at length there was something to see, I did not believe it myself. The black shadow lying on the black water certainly was less real than the dozen imaginary wolves I had already cried, and I continued to watch it, expecting it to vanish as had all the others. But it didn't.

The silence was suddenly broken by a hail: "Ship ahoy." Then a moment later: "Give way, men." There was a rattling of oar locks and the sound of some one stumbling over a thwart. "Give way, you damn fools, want to be run down?" The voice was sharp with anxiety; someone was impatient to be somewhere else. I could hear the grunt of the oarsmen as they threw their backs into it. Close on our

starboard bow there rose a rocket, seemingly from out the dark sea itself, and March swore softly to himself. Ahead of us at neatly spaced intervals other rockets soared.

"Good, good." Captain Merrihew had come up unnoticed. "The beggars have given away their position. Holt, instruct Mr. Lamar not to increase his speed. We can't take any chances on showing a glow from the stacks or barging into anybody.

I had conveyed the message to the bridge and was on the point of returning forward when a faint glow of light aft caught my eye. Running back along the deck I came upon the dark figure of a man squatting in the lee of a cotton bale and shading a match in his cupped hands. I seized him by the shoulder, none too gently, and as I did so the match winked out.

"What the devil do you mean, showing a light?" Angry as I was, I had the good sense to keep my voice lowered.

"Shure an' I was only takin' a draw on me pipe, sir," came the reply in the insinuating tones of Cahill.

"Didn't you hear Captain Merrihew give explicit orders against smoking or the showing of lights?"

"Now, ain't Danny Cahill the blessed idjit? Sir, 'tis ashamed I am, that calls meself a sailor, to have forgot."

"You ought to be. Now get forward." I answered. I fully intended to report Cahill's infraction of discipline, but I never did. Other events drove it from my mind.

The small boat lost in the darkness somewhere astern let go two more rockets in quick succession. The rockets by their direction were supposed to point out our position to the fleet, but I doubt if the fellow in charge of the boat had the haziest notion where we were. At any rate he was showing immense zeal in burning his fireworks and I trust his activity was accounted to him for merit by his superiors. The ships after their first display of rockets, probably discharged by nervous officers of the deck because they didn't know what else to do, had refrained from further pyrotechnics. This was decidedly unfortunate for us. We were now sure of but one thing, the position of the flagship. At what interval the other vessels lay was a matter of conjecture.

"Young sirs," Captain Merrihew confided to March and myself in a low voice, "as possible future commanders of blockade runners you will now receive a practical lesson in slipping through the lines. The flagship is our only known quantity, so to speak. We will therefore steer on her. It is to be supposed that if we pass either to starboard or larboard of her at just sufficient distance to escape observation we may hope to avoid running afoul of the flanking ships."

If our entrance some nights previously had been nervous work, this was worse. Then we were fairly sure that the enemy lay somewhere to our left and barring an encounter with shoal water we were relatively safe. Now we must thread our way among ships as to whose position we could only guess. I

shouldn't have cared to give odds on our making it. The boat we had so narrowly avoided sinking hadn't helped matters. And I could feel it in my heart to wish we had run them down, quickly before they had had a chance to squawk. As it was, though they had ceased to send up rockets the fleet was certainly aware that we were abroad and there would be no lack of sharp eyes on the lookout for us. I felt a lot the way a fox must feel when he's creeping through a spinney and the wind brings him a whiff of the hounds. I wondered if Captain Merrihew was absolutely devoid of nerves or whether he was merely putting up the show by which a good commander steadies his subordinates. At any rate he stood there in the bow, feet wide apart and hands deep in his pockets, dropping a low-voiced comment now and again to March. Neither in his attitude nor his voice could I detect a trace of that nervous tension which would have set my teeth clattering castanets but for the firmness with which I clenched my jaws.

The flagship's light was creeping slowly toward us. Confound it, why couldn't we make a dash for it? Suppose they did catch a glow, from the forced draft rushing up our stacks, and let fly a shell or two. The chances were against their hitting us. And anything was better than this snail's funeral march.

Now, unless my eyes deceived me, I could make out the shape of the flagship bulking through the gloom to larboard. It did not seem possible that we could slide past unobserved by the sharp eyes that must be

raking the darkness for us. Momentarily I expected a hail followed by a shot. I could not believe that our protective coloring would render us invisible at so short a distance. In the silence all about us the throb of our engines, which was a sensation rather than a sound, seemed to beat upon my tympanum like the roll of thunder. They must be both deaf and blind over yonder in the flagship. Yet so far we had escaped detection. Unless . . . Were they playing a waiting game? What if they were planning to let us penetrate to the center of the fleet before closing in on us from all sides?

We were past the flagship now and her solitary light was drawing slowly astern. But the most difficult passage lay yet before us. The flagship's position was the one thing we were sure of. To steer clear of the other vessels, wrapped as they were in darkness, we must trust to blockade-runner's luck.

Minutes pass slowly at times like this, but even so the flagship must be far astern by now; I did not dare look back for fear of seeing her light still close at hand. But even five knots are five knots, and we must surely be making that speed. Before very long now we'd be clear of the outlying ships and bowling merrily along for St. George's.

I was breathing easier, and had relaxed my tension somewhat when I caught my breath with a sharpness that might well have stopped my breathing for good. Dead ahead was a darker blot against the darkness.

Captain Merrihew had seen it at the same instant.

"Starboard your helm," he called to the bridge. The *Venture's* nose swung around—and none too soon at that. Even with what little way we had upon us it was touch and go whether we should clear the stranger's bow or ram her. From the other ships we could hear the order for dead astern. Then came a hail. "What ship? Lie to or I'll fire." The voice was a boyish treble that broke and trailed away oddly.

Captain Merrihew sprang to a cotton bale and thence to the bulwarks, steadying himself with an arm about a shroud. "Hard astern, you young idiot," he bellowed, "or I'll come aboard and spank you. Your orders are to remain at anchor."

"I saw the rockets, sir," called back the unhappy child. I could picture him a new-hatched ensign entrusted with the command of a small gunboat—and frightfully nervous.

"Rockets be damned. Stay where you are," Captain Merrihew shouted. "Admiral Dupont's orders."

A yard closer as we crossed the other ship's bow and we had scraped our paint. As we dropped him astern the child called after us unintelligible words—apologies and explanations, no doubt.

Captain Merrihew sprang to the deck. He was smiling and I would not swear that he did not wink.

"Present my compliments to Mr. MacAlpin, if you please, Holt, and tell him we can do with a bit of speed. There's no need for us to remain in the vicinity while our young friend is thinking things over," he added by way of explanation.

Chapter XVII

THE KNIFE IS FLESHED

It might have been ten o'clock the next morning when I was wakened from a cat nap on top of a cotton bale by a hail from the crow's nest. "Smoke dead astern." On the bridge Captain Merrihew and Mr. Lamar had their glasses trained in that direction.

"A business-like looking smoke, wouldn't you say, Mr. Lamar?" Captain Merrihew asked. "Either she's being chased or else she's doing the chasing."

The first officer nodded, without removing the glass from his eye, "It looks like bad medicine to me, sir."

Captain Merrihew whistled down the engine-room speaking-tube. "Full speed, Mr. MacAlpin, if you please, and never mind your engines. Drive 'em."

Up the ventilators came a scraping and banging of shovels on an iron floor as Mr. MacAlpin's demons bestirred themselves. From the *Venture's* stacks emerged two trees of black oily smoke, springing heavenward through the still air. Underfoot the decks began to quiver and from stem to stern the ship was seized with an ague fit of shaking that elicited protesting groans from her timbers. At a word from Captain Merrihew the helmsman threw the wheel over. If the

stranger kept on her way it would be plain that she had no interest in us. If she likewise changed her course it could mean but one thing, a long stern chase in broad daylight. The *Venture* had a considerable start of the other, but she was handicapped by the weight she carried and it was a good eight hours or more before dark.

Some anxious minutes passed. Owing to the distance which separated the ships it was at first impossible to determine whether the cause of our anxiety had followed our change of direction. Mr. March, who had been sent aloft, came shinning down in a hurry. His report left no doubt about the matter. Mr. MacAlpin's children were going to have a chance of proving themselves.

Before long it was apparent even to me that the stranger had the heels of us. Within an hour from the time she had been first sighted we could make her out plainly without the aid of glasses. I saw that she was not depending on her engines alone but had shaken out her canvas to catch whatever breeze was stirring.

Passing a group of men gathered at the rail I heard the cook's voice like a dismal sparrow's chirping from a hayrick: "Look at the spread of syle on 'er an' 'er mykin' two bleedin' knots to our one. W'en ye're all drowned wiv yer throats cut by the blarsted Yankees don't say I didn't warn yer."

Girond was rolling a cigarette. His left hand with those uncannily intelligent fingers which seemed to operate without any directing supervision of his brain, continued to fashion the slender paper cylinder. The

right he brought to within an inch of cookie's pudgy nose, snapping his fingers with a report so loud and sharp that the startled cook took a step rearward, almost with agility. "*Bah! Sale lache!*"

But cookie, with the courage of the man already condemned, this time faced the Gallic gamecock. "Bah, yerself, yer narsty little frog-eater. Wot price yer blinkin' 'igh and mighty R'yal Nivy captin', now? A-leadin' honest sailormen to their deaths in a ship wot's got a curse on her keel an' a livin', breathin' Jonah on 'er bridge!"

"Aisy now, me bullies, 'tis no time for shipmates to be fallin' afoul of aich other. Get you back to yer pots, doctor darlin' an' give us something to be warmin' our bellies wid. It may be we'll be suppin' this night on bread and water in the Yankee's brig."

"Good old Cahill," I thought. "Still pouring oil on the troubled waters." And I found it in my heart to forgive him his carelessness of the evening before.

To make matters worse the breeze showed signs of freshening; not a great deal, to be sure, but enough to give the pursuing cruiser another half knot or so. Captain Merrihew whistled down to the engine room. "We could do with another bit of speed, Mr. MacAlpin. I'm afraid we're not holding our own." A pause. "Good, I know you'll do your best." He turned to Mr. Lamar and the two entered into a discussion which soon got beyond my depth. As nearly as I could gather, we were at that time within a few miles of the Gulf Stream and it was the Captain's idea to take

advantage of the northward drift of the current, which would add some two knots to our speed. As we were already some miles ahead of our pursuer, we should gain considerable ground before she likewise entered the stream and was on an equal footing with us again.

The first thrill of the chase was over. It now settled down to a grim slogging race with our only hope to keep out of range of the cruiser's guns until darkness or a remotely possible fog offered us the cloak of invisibility. Underfoot the *Venture's* engines were thudding and pounding away as though they were bent on driving the bottom out of her. The vibration of the deck was enough to make one seasick, and now and again a long slow shudder would travel the length of the *Venture's* backbone.

Around noon I noted a sudden change in our course, and took it that we had headed up the Gulf Stream, though I dared not question either Captain Merrihew or Mr. Lamar, who broke their anxious silence only to exchange brief comments on the progress we were making. March had disappeared. Marcia Tempest I had not seen since she had come aboard the evening before. But for shame I would gladly have sought the strengthening presence of that courageous young woman. I hoped she would appear on the deck that I might have an opportunity of joining her. But she did not.

There was no question of a regular noonday meal for the officers. Girond appeared with tea and sandwiches, which were quickly dispatched in gloomy silence. We

had lengthened our lead somewhat, how much I cannot say. Distances at sea are not easy for the landsman. But the cruiser was by no means as near as she had been. However she had changed her course and was now dead astern once more. She was feeling the push of the northward rush of the Gulf Stream. On the other hand she had lost the advantage of the breeze and she was taking in her sails. Now it was steam against steam, and the prize to the better engines.

An hour passed.

To my way of thinking the *Venture* was not holding her own. The cruiser was undoubtedly creeping up on us. I could feel the doors of a Yankee prison closing on John Holt and at the same instant I saw deliverance.

So intently had my anxious eyes been riveted on the pursuit that I had neglected the other points of the compass. Some word or other dropped by Captain Merrihew to the first officer directed my attention forward, and I looked upon one of the fairest sights it has ever been my good fortune to witness.

Since the days of Columbus, mariners have cursed the sudden and freakish fogs of the Gulf Stream. But that white curtain stretching across the sea from horizon to horizon there to the northward—I leave to your imagination my feelings of thankfulness.

The crew, gathered in the bow with eager faces toward our salvation, were laughing and pounding each other amid jubilant cursing. Captain Merrihew's brow had relaxed. Only Mr. Lamar's face showed no sign

of relief. He was nervously gnawing at his lips. The strain has been too much for him, I thought.

Then I saw Mr. MacAlpin coming along the deck. He paused at the foot of the bridge ladder. Perspiration was streaming down his face and the drops sparkled in his eyebrows and beard.

"Captain Merry," he said with grave deliberation, "'twill be impossible to maintain our speed. The journals are runnin' sae hot that they've begun to grip. I've had a lad standin' by dousin' them wi' water this last hour but I misdoot it's doing a lot o' good."

Before he had finished speaking Captain Merrihew had joined him at the foot of the ladder. "What would you advise doing?"

"Weel, if we were in mid ocean and yon Yankee a hundred miles removed I'd advise liein' to an' lettin' the journals cool. In another five minutes they will be tight as a vise."

A glance sternward at the cruiser and a glance forward at the fog bank. Captain Merrihew made a rapid mental calculation. "I'll give you twenty minutes. Shut down your engines. Be ready to proceed at the end of that time."

"Veara good, sir."

In another minute the rumble of machinery had ceased and the paddles were stilled. We could feel the ship's headway falling off. The men forward, who a moment before had been raising their profane *te deums* had fallen of a sudden silent. They shuffled uneasy feet and craned their necks toward the bridge. Cahill

detached himself from the group at a hail from Captain Merrihew.

"There's been a bit of trouble in the engine-room. We'll have to lie to for a while, only a few minutes I hope. Pass the word along to the men. And by the way, Cahill, get out your fiddle and give us a tune."

"Aye, aye, sir." I could not hear what the Irishman said to his fellows, but a laugh from one or two of the men greeted his remarks. A man dived into the forecandle and returned with Cahill's fiddle.

To all appearances the man on whom rested the responsibility for ship and cargo was the least concerned of us all. During the minutes we lay there like a log he did not waste a single glance on the enemy bearing down upon us. He seemed much more interested in the performance of our chanteyman. Cahill had perched himself on an up-ended cotton bale and was smilingly sawing out a jig. The men had grouped themselves about the minstrel's throne, but more than a few furtive glances were cast in the direction of the cruiser and now and again some fellow would address a gruff whisper to his neighbor.

Mr. Lamar in spite of his efforts at self-control was taking it rather badly. Half-a-dozen times within the minute his watch would be out of his pocket and in again. And he had developed a twitching of the brows that seemed to foretell a complete nervous collapse. I wondered if Captain Merrihew noticed it.

"Mr. Lamar, I am going down to the engine-room. I reckon we have twenty minutes leeway yet before the

Yankee will be in long gunshot range of us. Call me if anything unexpected happens."

The first officer's "Very good, sir" was such as might have issued from the lips of a man starved for water—such a dry and husky whisper it was. Captain Merrihew glanced at him curiously. Then he turned and descended unhurriedly to the deck.

I felt relieved that Captain Merrihew had gone. I could appreciate the first officer's nervousness. I was jumpy as a cat myself. If our dodging among the darkened ships of the blockading fleet had threatened me with premature gray hair, this was ten times worse. Now we could see the disaster which was sweeping down upon us while we lay impotent in its path. Yes, I could understand Mr. Lamar's feelings. But why must he show them so plainly? For some reason all my old liking for him had returned, wiping out my suspicions and grievances as completely as a flood tide erases the footprints on a sandy beach. I was afraid he might burst into tears or do something equally outrageous, and I was glad the Captain would not be by to see him. I suffered keenly a vicarious embarrassment and forebore to look at him. Behind me I could hear him pacing the bridge from end to end.

"You may go forward. I will take the wheel myself," I heard Mr. Lamar say to the helmsman. The man must have hesitated, for the next moment the first officer was screaming curses at him—and the voice was not a man's, but the hysterical screech of a drunken fish-wife. I turned in astonishment to see the steers-

man's back retreating hastily down the ladder and the first officer staring after him shaking like a leaf. I think he had forgotten me. He was muttering to himself and I got the curious impression that he was praying. The cruiser, a black plume of smoke pouring from her single stack, was much nearer now. I could stand the strain no longer.

"Do you think, sir—"

I did not finish my sentence. At this moment there rose from below the welcome rumble of the engines and the *Venture* began to move. Mr. Lamar sprang to the wheel. I looked back at the cruiser. A ball of white smoke burst suddenly from her bow and a moment afterwards came a dull report. She had observed that we were under way again, and although still out of range, she had fired a gun as a command for us to lie to.

"Mr. Holt, go forward and tell the bosun to report to the bridge."

I hastened to obey. Something was wrong, I wasn't sure just what. But after delivering my order to the bosun, my next job would be to apprise Captain Merrihew with the fact that all was not well on the bridge.

I had traversed half the length of the deck when I noticed that the *Venture's* head was swinging round. And what the deuce was Cahill doing? He had dropped his fiddle and was standing erect on the cotton bale. His back was toward me, but he seemed to be holding some object in his hand which commanded the rapt attention of his erstwhile audience. It might

have been the Gorgon's head and they all frozen into stone. Then Cahill spoke:

"Stand ye still, bullies, and there's no harm done. I'd hate to be hurtin' of ye. But let wan of ye move a foot and he'll be wantin' a priest more than a doctor." His extended arm swept the circle before him in a gesture as it were of benediction. But at the end of the arm was a large and ugly looking revolver.

What followed remains branded on my memory, not so much a consecutive series of events, as a succession of pictures, vivid and clear cut, each complete in itself, yet curiously alone and unrelated to the rest. There is the impression of Cookie's moon face appearing at the door of his galley, mouth and eyes startled to little round "o's" of apprehension. There is a seascape of bright sunlight on green, white-streaked water whereon rides the cruiser bearing upon our starboard beam. For by now the *Venture's* head is describing a great arc.

There is a tableau. It might have been a wax work group at Madame Tussaud's, so motionless are the actors. Captain Merrihew is standing at the foot of the ladder leading to the bridge. One hand grasps the handrail and one foot rests on the bottom step. On the bridge is the first officer. With one hand he steadies the wheel, the other hangs motionless at his side. His face is a white mask with a straight gash of compressed lips and eyes narrowed to two slits.

It seems that I can even see myself, standing there on the deck which is already beginning to quiver under

the drive of the engines. Now, if ever, is my opportunity to show the stuff that heroes are made of. Shall I nip below and order the engines stopped—the engines that are now driving us hell for leather toward the enemy? No. Another delay would be suicidal. Any moment now the cruiser would be within range. Our one hope lay in keeping going.

With the abandonment of my first plan my intellectual processes stopped with a click. Had I done something, anything, without waiting to reason, it might have been the right thing. As it was, I found myself bound and tied, not only mentally but physically. Thereafter I could only stand and stare, awaiting the inevitable catastrophe.

Now time, which had stood still, began to move again—and persons and events.

"Captain Merrihew, stand where you are!" I would never have recognized the harsh, rasping voice as that of our gentle-spoken first officer. Slowly the pistol which had dangled by his side was brought to cover the man at the bottom of the ladder.

Captain Merrihew did not reply. He raised the foot which had rested on the deck and placed it on the second step of the ladder. Without haste he was mounting step by step. He was half way up by now. Did I see it at that distance or only imagine Lamar's finger tightening on the trigger? The first officer spoke again. "I have warned you, sir." Captain Merrihew mounted another step.

Behind me I heard the "hah" and the stamp of the

foot, as of a fencer making a lunge. Something whirred past my ear. You know the sound a grouse makes getting up from the ground. Mr. Lamar made an odd helpless sort of gesture with his arms and the revolver dropped from his fingers. He staggered backward to the railing. Then his knees crumpled under him and he sagged down on the bridge, sitting with his legs stretched out before him and his back resting against the rail. With chin on breast he looked down curiously at the knife whose handle protruded from beneath his collarbone.

Girond darted past me, running lightly and without effort in his cat-footed way. In one hand he held a murderous looking butcher's knife, twin to the weapon which had hurtled past my ear and buried itself in the first officer's chest. Captain Merrihew had stepped across Mr. Lamar's legs and was wrenching at the wheel to bring the *Venture* on her course again. Girond, up the ladder like a monkey, was now standing at its head ready to defend the bridge against all comers.

When it was all over and done with, I gathered a few fragments of my shattered wits together and climbed to the bridge. The Frenchman had taken the wheel and Captain Merrihew was on one knee beside the stricken man.

"Here, let me get it out." It took a sharp tug, but the first officer did not wince. Captain Merrihew sent the knife shimmering into the sea. "How goes it?" he asked. Mr. Lamar's reply was the ghost of a smile. His words were not an answer to the Captain's ques-

tion, but were addressed to me: "Mr. Holt, examine that revolver, if you please. You will find it is not loaded." I picked up the weapon. The chambers were empty.

I turned, with the revolver in my hand, to face Marcia Tempest. "You mustn't," I said, attempting to place myself between her and the wounded man. I don't think she saw or heard me. Her eyes were those of a somnambulist. With a gesture of her hand she brushed me aside and knelt, drawing Lamar's head to her shoulder. His eyes were closed and he was breathing painfully. There was a little froth of blood on his lips, and she was wiping it away with her handkerchief.

"Marius." She bent down her head so that her lips were close to his ear. "Marius, are you badly hurt?"

He opened his eyes at that and looked up at her. "It's—It's all right, Marcia. I tried—and failed—thank God." He sighed and his eyelids closed down again.

I stooped, thinking to render some assistance. But the girl motioned me away. "Please. He is my husband."

The sound of a second gun from the cruiser recalled us to the business at hand. Men might live or men might die, but ship and cargo must be saved. Else the rosy gills of solid Liverpool citizens might lose their roses through worry, and Lancashire spinners might go breadless and baconless to bed.

Girond with the concentration of a wooden Indian

—or a juggler—was staring straight before him. His duty to Mon Capitaine had required him to flesh a knife to the hilt in a fellow human. Bien. It was done. His duty was now to hold the *Venture* on her course. Bien. He was so holding her. If he felt any compunction or any curiosity concerning the results of his handiwork, he betrayed no sign of either.

In the matter of duty, Girond and his captain were kindred souls. Merrihew could not have failed to hear Marcia Tempest's words to me. Nor could they have been other than a staggering blow to his hopes and illusions. But valuable time had already been lost—fatally lost, it might well be. His duty was to his ship and his owners. Personal losses and griefs must await their turn. That is the code of every seaman worthy the name, I suppose. But the memory of Arthur Merrihew as I saw him in this, his dark hour, remains with me still, and at world-weary three score and ten I am as ready to do him reverence as I was at hero-worshipping twenty.

Without a second glance at the woman he loved or the man who had betrayed him, he rose. In his countenance there was nothing more than the gravity natural in a commander whose ship is in peril. For a moment he stood with his eyes fixed upon the cruiser and I knew he was calculating the knots and minutes which would bring her guns within striking distance.

"Holt," he said, "go down and break out a barrel or so of turpentine and a bale of cotton. Have them

carried to the engine room. Mr. MacAlpin will know what to do with them."

Passing the galley I saw the cook peering cautiously out of his doorway. I noticed that the deck appeared curiously deserted and for the first time I remembered Cahill.

"Where's Cahill?" I asked the man of pots and kettles.

"'E's down the fo'castle, sir, wi' the bosun standin' guard over 'im," he replied. "W'en 'e saw Mr. Lamar go down 'e chucked 'is pistol over the side an' went like a bleedin' lamb, 'e did."

In the companion way I met March, yawning and stretching. He grinned at me. That provokingly phlegmatic young man had been below enjoying his forty winks. I realized then that the whole amazing business had not taken more than three minutes. March had been getting into his boots. Mr. MacAlpin had in all probability been crooning one of his improvised psalms—the good man's substitute for swearing—over his recalcitrant engines. The firemen had been feverishly feeding the insatiable red maws of their furnaces. And not one of them suspected that on deck a mutiny had broken out and been quelled in the time it takes to drain a pint of ale.

When I returned to the bridge Mr. Lamar had been carried down. Only a red drop here and there on the planking remained to tell of what had taken place. A seaman was now at the wheel in place of Girond, who

was nowhere to be seen. Captain Merrihew and March were silently marking the progress of the cruiser. Either she was mending her pace or else our overheated engines were slacking off. She was alarmingly close now and any minute we could expect a shot. The friendly fog bank to the north seemed no nearer than when I had first remarked it.

"Do you think we'll make it, sir?" March asked at length.

"It'll be touch and go. We can't hope to run into the fog before she gets within range. We'll have to chance stopping a shell or two," Captain Merrihew replied.

I wondered what inner turmoil was going on behind that impassive front. Few men I should say have received so many buffets from fate in a single hour. Even old Job's misfortunes came singly. But here were all Captain Merrihew's hopes clattering down about his ears at one fell swoop. The woman he loved, unfaithful and lost to him, a man he had trusted, guilty of the grossest disloyalty; his ship in imminent danger of capture and himself of prison. You could forgive a man for letting go under circumstances like that. Swearing or whimpering or losing his head or giving up. But Arthur Merrihew wasn't that kind. I fancy one of those thumping old Roman stoics would have taken it as he did—stiff-necked.

The cruiser's bow gun spoke again. It was no warning shot this time. The shell sent up a water spout a cable's length astern of us.

Captain Merrihew stepped to the engine-room speaking tube. "Throw some cotton and turpentine on your fires, Mr. MacAlpin. Give us smoke and plenty of it."

Almost as he finished speaking, oily and black there rolled from the *Venture's* stacks two great plumes that became one, and trailed away hanging low in an atmosphere that was already beginning to thicken into a light mist. Again the cruiser fired. She was getting our range and the shell came uncomfortably close. But already the veil of smoke from our funnels was spreading over the sea. Her outlines were growing dim. Then she faded from view. Instantly Captain Merrihew ordered a change from our almost due northerly course to north by east. The next shot, fired by guess work into the curtain of smoke, went far to larboard of us.

Ahead the weather was getting perceptibly thicker. We could feel the welcome moisture on our faces. Fifteen minutes later we were headed for St. George's through a regular pea-soup fog.

Chapter XVIII

WE COMMIT ONE TO THE DEEP

AT eight bells that evening I was notified that Mr. Lamar was asking for me. I found him in his cabin, lying in his bunk with a sheet thrown over him. His shirt was open, disclosing the bandages which swathed his chest. Captain Merrihew occupied one of the two chairs the cabin afforded and Marcia Tempest was seated on the side of the bunk fanning the sufferer. Neither of the watchers spoke as I entered, Captain Merrihew merely signing me to take the other chair.

"Marius," said the girl in a voice I had never before heard from her lips—so lifeless it was—"they are here now."

Mr. Lamar, who had been lying with closed eyes, turned his head slightly on the pillow and looked at us. I had been prepared to find him a dying man, perhaps in great pain. But I was not prepared for the change I read in the face turned toward me. It was not the Lamar I had known. He was no longer the lost soul, but one who has entered into "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" or something very like it. It may have been the uncertain light of the lamp which swayed to the motion of the ship. It may have been

an actuality. But it seemed to me that the lines which had seamed his countenance were gone. He looked ten years younger—a thousand years younger in spirit.

"It was good of you to come, gentlemen," he spoke in a low voice but with perfect distinctness. "I have an explanation to make. I owe it to you, Captain Merry, as my commanding officer, and to Mr. Holt as a shipmate whose sympathy and friendship I have valued more than he may suspect."

"Do you think you are strong enough to talk just now? Hadn't you better wait a day or so?" Captain Merrihew broke in. A strange attitude for the captain of a ship to take towards a wounded mutineer. But then the whole thing was extraordinary, and neither captain nor mutineer an ordinary man.

"Thanks, sir. But I'm stronger now than I will ever be again."

There was nothing more to be said. Perhaps Captain Merrihew's further remonstrances were checked by a natural resentment against a foe, a fallen foe it is true, but one who had not fought in the open. I think, however, it was kindness that prompted him not to oppose the dying man's wish to speak.

The first officer continued. "Mr. MacAlpin has made a good job of it." He glanced down at his bandaged chest. "A surgeon couldn't have done more. But I doubt if I will make port. However, that's as may be.

"My name is Marius Lamar Quintard. I am a commander in the United States Navy. You will find

my papers locked in the desk there if you care to verify my statements later. Mr. Holt, I told you something of the mental anguish I went through when I was faced with the terrible and irrevocable decision which every Southern man in the Navy had to make. About half of us decided one way and half the other. Most of the younger fellows—the midshipmen particularly—resigned almost to a man. It was easier for them, I reckon. The traditions of the service hadn't bitten in so deep, and the home ties were stronger. With the older men it was different. Some, like Farragut, stayed. I remember his remarking to a group of officers who were going home: 'I tell you, you fellows will catch the devil before you get through with this business.' But I don't believe it was fear of catching the devil that influenced his decision. Other men well up in the service, like Maury and Semmes, sacrificed certain promotion to offer their swords to a nation without a navy and small chance of ever getting one.

"I elected to stand by the old flag. I thought it was the right thing to do. I hoped that after the first wrench, the sense of having done my duty would sustain me. Make up a little for the loss of the rest. I kept on saying to myself: 'You've got to follow the dictates of your conscience. You mustn't look back.' But I have been looking back ever since. I've asked myself time and again since that day whether if I had taken the other course I would have been any happier. I don't believe I would have. It was one of those impossible situations, with no right and wrong

side of it—both wrong. I wonder if you can understand?"

He had raised himself on his elbow. The girl put her hand on his shoulder and gently pressed him back onto the pillow.

"I think I understand," Captain Merrihew said gravely.

"There was one fellow in particular who had me almost persuaded to go over. He was from Louisiana. We were roommates as midshipmen. Served in the same ships. Ours was the sort of friendship a man encounters once or twice in a lifetime—if he's lucky. He had thrown up his commission and was leaving for the South that night. 'You really know what you are doing, Quintard?' he said. 'You are cutting yourself off from home for good. Your folks will disown you. You'll be worse than a Yankee. You'll be a man who's turned his hand against his own. Even when this mess is all over, you will be an exile, a man without a country. You can't ever go back. The Yankees themselves will despise you in their hearts just as the English couldn't swallow Benedict Arnold. The fellows you were raised with and played with as a boy, your kinsmen, your own father, maybe—you'll be fighting them. If there's any girl down there—' He went over all the arguments I had had out with myself a thousand times. And all the answer I could make was, 'I know.' If ever a man was tempted I was then. It was pure, unadulterated hell. How gladly I would have gone with him if I could. Every natural

instinct, every argument of self-interest was pleading on his side. All I had to pit against him and the warm urging of my own heart was a vague, cold sense of duty. The very fact that I would have given my right arm to go with him made me sure, for the time at least, that my duty lay the other way. Somewhere in my family tree there must have been a dour old Puritan sitting on a limb croaking about the broad and easy way that leadeth to destruction."

The wistful wraith of a smile hovered for an instant about the corners of his mouth.

"'You've always been a queer cuss,' my friend said at the end, 'and stubborn as a cross-eyed mule. When you think you're right there's no moving you. And most of the time what seems right to you looks like plain foolishness to most of us. Before I go I want to shake hands with the best friend I ever hope to have, the damndest fool I ever want to meet, and the bravest man I ever expect to know.'

"You won't mind my telling you that. A man doesn't have a lot of vanity when he's in my position. It's just a part of the story. I've got to tell it in the hope of making you understand my position. I'd hate to go out leaving you all thinking me an utter scoundrel."

For several minutes he lay with his eyes closed as though he had overtaxed his failing strength. Marcia Tempest held a glass of water to his lips. He thanked her and resumed his narrative.

"I hoped that the storm would blow over without a lot of bloodshed. But after Bull Run and the blockading of the Southern ports I knew that it was war to the death. It was then I realized fully the gravity of the decision I had made. I looked forward with horror to the day I would be ordered to sea. I pictured myself training guns against my own people. With that I played the coward. I realized I had shouldered a burden which I was not man enough to carry. I applied for the post of naval attaché at the embassy in London. The man who had the job was anxious to fight and we made the exchange. I had hoped that getting away from things would bring relief. It didn't. I wonder if any remorse-ridden murderer ever felt worse than I did. For a year or more I skulked in London, hiding behind that embassy job. I began to feel that my colleagues despised me for snugging down in a safe place and letting the others do the fighting. It may have been all my imagination, but God knows I despised myself. I began to doubt even my own sincerity in refusing to go over to the Southern cause. Perhaps, after all, my decision had been dictated by physical cowardice. Was it plain fear that kept me from fighting on either side?

"In the end I determined that my own self-respect demanded that I play a man's part. Perhaps I might be fortunate enough to be detailed on some particularly hazardous duty. You see, I wanted to vindicate myself in my own eyes by some death or glory business. I

was on the point of taking up the matter of a transfer with the ambassador when he took the initiative himself.

"He called me into his office one day. I wondered what was up. He seemed as if he had something to say, but hardly knew how to say it. Finally he blurted it out: 'Mr. Quintard, there's a job that needs doing and somebody's got to do it. It's not a thing I'd like to ask of an officer and a gentleman. It's not a white man's work but it's necessary. Before I ask you to accept I want to tell you what it is.'

"To make a long story short, Washington was getting worried about the number of blockade runners that were successfully running the gauntlet of the fleet, and a determined effort was to be made to break up the trade. Somebody had hit upon the scheme of planting on each of the blockade runners a spy who would watch his chance of betraying the ship into the hands of the enemy. Your ship, Captain Merrihew, was selected for a tryout, and the ambassador had decided on me as the man to play the rôle of betrayer. My Southern birth and accent would make it easy for me to ship as a Confederate naval officer looking for an opportunity to slip through the Federal lines.

"I guess the ambassador had expected to have an argument on his hands but I surprised him by accepting without hesitation. I figured that taking on a mean low-down job like that would be a sort of penance. Like the haircloth shirt or the dried peas in your

shoes—" again the ghost of what might once have been a particularly engaging smile.

"The papers and recommendations I brought you from the Confederate agents in London were forgeries. I hope you'll believe me that I felt a pretty low sort of a cur when you swallowed my story hook, line and sinker. If you had been more suspicious I wouldn't have cared so much—or if you had been a different man than you are. I had expected to find the skipper of a blockade runner a shifty, venial sort of buccaneer whom you wouldn't greatly mind cheating. Instead I found—well, you don't suppose I didn't see Royal Navy written all over you? I came within an ace of throwing the whole thing up, but I had already turned my back on duty once. I mustn't fail again. Who was I to be squeamish? It was scavenger's work but so much the better. I must win back to self-respect through humiliation. I wonder if you understand?"

"I think I do." Captain Merrihew's tone, I thought, was almost tender. The girl seated at the foot of the bunk opened her lips as if to speak, but no words came.

"No doubt you thought me an ungracious brute. You won't mind my saying it now, but I have never met a man I respected both as a man and a commander more than yourself, Captain Merry. I would have been happy and honored to meet far more than half way the friendliness you seemed disposed to offer. But I couldn't. I was compelled to build up a wall of reserve

around myself and live inside it like a prisoner in a solitary dungeon. To betray the man you respect is hard enough. To betray a friend—it would take a Judas to do that. Taking wine with you or a sociable glass of brandy was torture. The stuff actually burned my throat as it went down. Any little act of courtesy on your part, as from one gentleman to another, seemed to make my contemplated treachery all the blacker. I remember once accepting a cigar from you—I couldn't in politeness refuse—and then throwing it away when you weren't looking. It sounds foolish, I know."

"No," said Captain Merrihew, and again "no."

"Cahill, if you will remember, signed on shortly after I did. He had served under me on more than one ship and I knew him for a man unusually intelligent and of the utmost devotion to duty. I ran across him by chance in London just about the time I was laying my plans. He was on leave from his ship then lying in Liverpool. The very man to help me, if I get into a tight place, I thought. I got in touch with his commanding officer at once and the thing was arranged. Cahill entered into the affair with all his Irish love of intrigue. It was his idea to play the part of a lazy good-natured simpleton, to gain the good will of the men forward, and to work subtly on their superstitious natures, in case a disaffected crew might fit in with our plans, which were as yet hazy.

"The substitution of the Newcastle coal for the Welsh was my work. If you don't mind, I won't go

into details as to how it was managed. It would involve others besides myself. I hoped for an early opportunity to complete my mission and turn to some more honorable work. But my hopes of an early release from my serfdom of treachery were short-lived. On our arrival at St. George's I went immediately to the American consul there—a man called Coffin. It was an unlucky move for me. I wanted advice as to how best to proceed. I got it—with a vengeance. I don't think I have ever really hated a man in my life before or since. But if I know the meaning of the word, I hate Coffin. Or I did. As things stand now, he and all his works seem pretty insignificant. I suppose it's natural for a man who knows there's no earthly tomorrow for him, or not many of them at any rate, to jettison all such useless cargo as hate and ambition and things of that sort. However, that's beside the point.

"Coffin's first handshake filled me with repulsion. It was as instinctive and as unreasonable as the creepy feeling you get when you pick up a toad. I simply didn't like the fellow. Before I left him I could cheerfully have murdered him on his own doorstep. And the worst of it was, I knew all the time I was being terribly unjust to the man. His only fault was this. He pointed out to me a rare opportunity to render signal service to my country. He opened my eyes to something I hadn't seen and would far rather have remained blind to.

"I think if he had been a more sympathetic character

I might have forgiven him for adding to the burden on my conscience. Of course, he couldn't help looking like the mummy of a pharaoh dressed in a circuit rider's clothes any more than he could help his rusty file of a voice, or his nasty habit of rubbing his hands together and craning his neck like an old turkey buzzard. But all the same, either you like a man or you don't. And I didn't like him. I hadn't been in his company five minutes before I told him so. What made me do that wasn't his looks, though; it was some particularly unpleasant things he had to say about the South and the Southern people. I won't repeat it. It doesn't matter anyway. His tirade sounded like a chapter out of one of the minor prophets with interpolations by a stable boy.

"I brought him up short. 'See here, Mr. Coffin, I came to ask your advice about a specific matter, not to hear your political views. I am an officer in the United States Navy and loyal, I hope. But as it happens I'm Southern born and you have used some very offensive expressions, which from a younger man —' He apologized, of course, but his next question was an insult. 'You are willing to prove your loyalty, of course, Mr. Quintard?' 'Not to you, sir,' I said, 'and I wish you a very good morning.' Again he was all apology, pawing me over like a second-hand clothes-dealer and pressing me back into my chair. He had intended no offense. It was merely that he had a suggestion to make as to how I could render a great and lasting service to the Union cause.

"He unfolded his plan. Instead of delivering up the *Venture* at the first opportunity, I was to make my way into Charleston aboard of her. In my guise of Confederate naval officer, I would have little difficulty in obtaining priceless information in regard to the defenses of the harbor and the strength of the garrison. I would then be in a position to hand over to the admiral in command of the blockading fleet not only a blockade runner but what might well prove the keys of the citadel as well.

"I indignantly refused to be a party to the scheme. I had my instructions and did not propose to go one step beyond them. I had no intention of becoming a spy. He argued and cajoled. I was firm in my refusal. He even threatened to report me for disloyalty. I marched out of his office. He followed me to the door, still pleading and blustering in the same breath. I told him roundly 'No' and left him.

"But as I turned from his doorstep I knew that I would do it. I was like a man who has apprenticed his soul to the devil. There was no turning back, I must go on, deeper and deeper. My dislike of the man could not deafen me to the justice of his argument. There is no middle ground between loyalty and disloyalty. The soldier may not choose his duty. Neglect of an opportunity to harm the enemy is as grave a crime as cowardice. I now knew my anger against Coffin for what it was—an attempt, unconscious if you will, to find an excuse for evading my duty. Thus it was I embarked upon the vilest trade

known to man, the meanest office a nation at war can require of one of her sons. I became a spy.

"Immediately upon our arrival in Charleston I set about worming my way into the confidence of the officers in the forts. I was trusted in influential circles, as you know, Captain Merry. As an honorable man you can imagine my feelings as I sat at mess tables listening to the unguarded conversation of fellows who had welcomed me as a brother in arms. From pitifully scanty stores they opened bottles in my honor, pressing upon me a hospitality that I violated in the act of accepting. The very Southern speech upon their tongues was a reproach that stung until I writhed inwardly. Can you conceive of my self-loathing when I would be extracting information from some fresh-faced schoolboy of an officer—turning him inside out as a pickpocket would empty a purse he had filched? I couldn't pass a woman or a child on the street without thinking: 'One of these days you will be fleeing terror-stricken from a doomed and falling city or perhaps buried in its ruins. And your sorrow—your blood maybe—will be on my head.'

"You remember, Mr. Holt, the night I showed you the plans Major Rainey had taken from the captured spy? I told you he had shown them to me. He hadn't. He merely told me they were in his possession and I made him drunk so that I could get a look at them. You will wonder why I half confided in you that night. I wonder myself. It was done on impulse, with the hope down deep in my heart that you would

suspect something and possibly denounce me. That must have been it. By that time I had reached the point where, if I had been a praying man, I would have prayed, not for success, but failure. I wanted Providence or Fate—some force outside myself—to relieve me of the awful burden which I could neither sustain nor lay down. If ever a man's soul was the battleground of warring forces, mine was.

When we sailed from Carlestown last night—to think it was less than twenty-four hours ago—I gave Cahill his instructions. He was to wait until we were in the midst of the Federal fleet and then show a light. For some reason he failed to carry out his orders.”

“No,” I broke in, “he didn’t.” And I related the incident of the pipe.

“Good old Cahill!” Mr. Lamar’s voice was growing weak; he could scarcely raise it above a whisper. “Well, you know the rest. If Coffin had succeeded in his attempt to kidnap you that last night we were in St. George’s my task would have been easier. As commander of the ship I could have surrendered her to the Federal fleet without much difficulty. You can imagine I was on pins and needles as sailing time approached and you hadn’t shown up. I wasn’t sure that Coffin had any hand in your non-appearance because I had broken off relations with him definitely, but I suspected what was up. Mr. Ravenel was bent on our putting to sea without waiting for you and of course I fell in with his ideas. When you finally came aboard I didn’t know whether to feel relieved that

nothing serious had happened to you or to feel chagrined that I was to have an infinitely harder job on my hands than I had hoped.

"Fate had the cards stacked against me at every turn—or in my favor. I don't know which. At any rate, something always turned up to spoil my plans. I suppose there's a weak spot in my character somewhere and that a really strong man would have put the business through somehow. I haven't much of a record to be proud of. Maybe if my heart had really been in the business . . . However . . .

"I had made it up with Cahill that as a last resort we would take possession of the ship, but I made him promise that he would not load his pistol and mine was empty, too. I had reached the limit of my courage. I stuck at cold-blooded murder.

"If I had been fanatically attached to the Union I suppose I could have murdered you all in your sleep, if it were necessary. By the same token, if I had believed ardently in States' Rights, I would have gone over to the South without a second thought. Even if I had been thoroughly self-centered and considered only my own best interests I would have been happier. As it was, I had no deep-seated convictions to see me through—not even the egoist's sense of his own supreme importance.

"When the time came for me to decide whether my duty lay North or South, I tried to reason things out. When I saw my last chance of delivering the *Venture* over to her pursuers slipping out of my grasp,

I was still questioning myself. I knew that half-a-dozen cartridges in my revolver might make all the difference between success and failure, but I knew that you were not the man to submit to capture without a struggle, Captain Merry. Could I shoot you down on your own deck, I asked myself, and I knew that I couldn't. There are times when a man can't afford to reason. He must act blindly, instinctively, or not at all.

"In times of stress reason is a mighty weak reed to lean on. We've got to fall back on the emotions—hate, love, prejudice, anger—it doesn't matter much which. It is feeling, not thought, that gives a man conviction to carry him through a tight place. Convictions make heroes and saints and martyrs—and great sinners, too, I imagine. It's what we are pleased to call intellect that makes doubters, and waverers and cowards of us all. It's funny."

Mr. Lamar's voice trailed off and he lay very still, staring up at the ceiling. He was smiling as though there really were something amusing in his reflections.

For a long time there was silence in the cabin. Captain Merrihew was, I think, as deeply moved as I by the first officer's recital. Some of my conceptions had been rudely shaken during the last half hour. I, in common with most youths, had my rigid standards to which I expected men and manners and events to conform. For the past two weeks I had been in a state of uncertainty about the rightness and wrongness of a number of things myself. And Mr. Lamar's story had

done nothing to compose my mind. I realized that serious doubts had arisen to cast their shadows athwart my faith in the little twin gods, It's Done and It Isn't Done. For the first time I had been called to sit in judgment on a case whereon the law and the prophets of the British Public School spoke haltingly and without authority.

Marcia Tempest, who had remained seated motionless on the foot of the bunk, had let her hand fall on one of Lamar's which rested on the coverlet, and he seemed well content to have it there. Her eyes were on a single star sewn on a ground of black velvet which swayed to and fro across a porthole.

The wounded man was the first to speak. "I think," he said, "I think I could do with a little brandy and a cheroot." You've no idea how that simple request cheered me. A dying man surely would never want a drink of brandy and a cheroot, ergo Mr. Lamar would weather the storm. Captain Merrihew was on his feet in a wink. "Here, old man, let me raise you a bit." The grateful look which the first officer gave him spoke volumes. A stiff dose of brandy brought a little color to the wan cheeks, and though he coughed over the smoke a bit at first, Mr. Lamar was soon puffing away contentedly enough, propped up on a pillow.

"There is a favor I would ask, if I quite dared," he began doubtfully. The Captain nodded encouragement. "I am sure, sir, that you know how to value courage and loyalty. And that gives me the hardihood

to plead for lenience in the case of Cahill. Of course, he's guilty of mutiny on the high seas, but against that I plead the fact that he was acting in the service of his country. What he did, he did under my instructions. I will soon be beyond the reach of the law. I'd hate to think I'm leaving him to bear the punishment alone."

"Say no more," Captain Merrihew said. "I'll release Cahill from custody tonight and I'll have him paid off at St. George's. Pray consider the incident closed."

"There is no use my attempting to express my appreciation of your generosity, sir."

"Then don't attempt it," said the Captain with a smile. "Come, young Holt, it's time we let the patient get some rest." For a moment he stood looking down on the sufferer from his great height. Then he bent down. "Mr. Lamar," he said, "will you permit me to shake hands with a very brave man? I trust when my test comes I may meet it with the courage you have shown."

There was that in my throat which forbade my speaking even if I had been able to think of anything to say. But I followed Captain Merrihew's example. I hope the pressure of my silent handclasp conveyed what I felt in my heart. In the act of closing the door, I looked back. The color had ebbed again from Mr. Lamar's face until it was as white as the pillow against which it rested, but it was a face expressive of a happiness such as I have seldom seen upon a human coun-

tenance. I am glad I looked back. It was the last time I ever saw him and it is good to remember him thus.

It happened some time during the night. The strange, brave girl, whom I could never think of as his wife, was alone with him. And alone, she saw it through. I never knew all the details, nor cared to know them. I only know there was a hemorrhage that drenched him and her and dyed the bedclothes a horrible red. But there were no frantic calls for assistance which she knew would be helpless before the inevitable. The horror of blood was short, I hope. I like to think that the passing of that storm-wracked soul was peaceful. I like to believe that to the last he was conscious of the pressure of the brave and gentle hand that held his own.

When it was over, white-faced and wide-eyed, she knocked at Mr. MacAlpin's door. And the good old Scotsman led her to her cabin and with kindly authority, as though she were in truth his ain Janie, he bade her rest. It was he who performed the simple offices required by those fortunate enough to die at sea and thus escape the ghastly futilities of the undertaker. With his own hands he sewed the earthly part of Marius Lamar Quintard decently into an all-concealing shroud of canvas.

Next morning the crew was mustered amidships in a little clearing made among the cotton bales. On a grating rested the white shape. Captain Merrihew opened the prayer-book and closed it again. "Men," he

turned to the seamen who stood bareheaded and silent, "we are about to bury an officer of the United States Navy, whose duty called him to sail under false colors and engage in an act of mutiny. Under ordinary circumstances such an act would have been a crime. In time of war, however, his conduct becomes not only excusable but honorable. Mr. Holt, go to the flag locker and get the American colors. When a man dies for his country, it is only fitting that he should be buried with all the honors of war."

He took the flag I brought and draped it over the still shape. Then opening the book he began to read.

"I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that liveth and believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

As he read on I glanced stealthily about the little company. There was Girond, his arms folded across his chest staring straight before him. His duty to Mon Capitaine required that he be there. Bien. He was there. There was Mr. MacAlpin and clinging to his arm, just as his ain Janie might have done, was the widow whom I could not think of as ever having been a wife. I was troubled at the still white face and the wide, dry eyes of her. A little withdrawn stood Cahill. As I looked he passed the back of his hand across his eyes and I felt the moisture spring to my own.

And now four seamen stepped forward, and lifting the grating, rested one end of it on the bulwarks. There was a hush as Captain Merrihew paused. Even the

ship seemed to hold her breath as the ceaseless thudding of the engines was for a moment stilled.

"We therefore commit his body to the deep—"
Something moved, agitating the folds of the flag, and a white shape glided slowly over the side. The flag lay flat and lifeless against the grating.

Chapter XIX

THE CAPTAIN STOOPS TO FOLLY

"HOLT," said Captain Merrihew, "I've been thinking. I'm going to chuck this job." It was the afternoon of the day we buried the first officer and we were seated in the cabin that had once been his. Captain Merrihew had required my assistance in going over the papers and effects of the dead man with a view to their proper disposal. But he seemed in no hurry to set about the task. Instead, with long legs extended and hands deep in his trousers pockets, he was staring at the floor. For the first time in our acquaintance, short in days, but long as measured by my affectionate regard, I saw him in a state of depression.

I never knew much about his past, but I am willing to wager that never before had he felt life thus pressing in around him. Primarily the man of action, his foes heretofore had been the enemies of the Queen, or dirty weather and lee shores—things a man can fight with his two hands, or gunpowder or seamanship. But now he was face to face with his own soul, and that in a state of mutiny. I take it that never before had a woman meant much to him. And I doubt that he had had a lot to do with women anyway. His type doesn't

usually. Not that they are Josephs, but they aren't Casanovas. To be the great lover a man must have a thick streak of the feminine in his make up. Else he doesn't know the rules of the game by instinct or care enough about it to learn. The essential male is usually too much occupied in a fight of one sort or another—it may be from an office stool or the deck of a battleship or on a sheep ranch—to give much thought or time to the boudoir. Sometimes he escapes the perils of love altogether. If he doesn't, and he catches it fairly late in life, it is like to go hard with him, just as measles is more dangerous to an adult than a child.

"Yes," he said and more to himself than to me, "I'm going to chuck it."

"Yes, sir," I said. A useful phrase that, when employed by subordinate to superior. It may convey anything from acquiescence to a command to respectful sympathy with a mood.

"Yes," he continued, "it's a good game in a way and a profitable one. But it's not for me and I'm not easy in it. I don't say that I don't love the chink of golden guineas as well as the next man. But there are other things for a man to be doing than getting gold—especially if he's been bred to the sea. What would I do with it when I got it? Lose it to some land shark or other like as not, or retire on a two pence ha' penny income, and settle down in the country. Ever see a seaman retired before his time? He usually turns into a crockety old crab with too many hours in his day and a chronic nostalgia for the old life. Of course, if I

had any one dependent on me—a wife, say—But I haven't and chances are I never will."

He was silent a while, frowning at the floor. Then he began again. I don't think he was speaking to me so much as to his own conscience. I merely represented that conscience and all this talk about the worthlessness of guineas was preliminary to excusing himself for the rather gorgeous piece of folly he was contemplating.

"No, boy, money never did a sailor any good, be he foremast Jack or admiral. Unless he's a Scot like Mr. MacAlpin. That is the one race which can touch the stuff without its rotting their fibre. And besides I've a smell in my nostrils that recalls days I wouldn't mind re-living a bit. It's the smell of burned powder. By the Lord, Holt," he spoke with sudden passion—"I've been shot at like a grouse and I've had to run for it like a hare. And it goes against the grain, by gad it does.

"If you're booked for Davy Jones, it's better to go down with your bow towards the enemy than your stern. Holt, I've a feeling that I'd like to lay my eye along a gun again before I'm too old."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"And besides that, I'm in duty bound in a way to carry out a mission that's fallen to me as a sort of legacy, so to speak. You remember poor Lamar's saying he was received in influential circles? Well, he was. Mr. Mallory, Secretary of the Navy of the Confederacy, was in Charleston with a chest of gold in-

tended for the Confederate agents in London and a packet of papers, instructions of some sort, to be forwarded to Captain Raphael Semmes, now somewhere on the seven seas. Lamar was introduced to the Secretary as a Confederate naval officer at present serving on a blockade runner. What better courier would the Secretary require? So Lamar was entrusted with the delivery of the papers and the money. Mr. Mallory did me the courtesy, as commander of the ship, to take me into his confidence—and as a precaution likewise, in case of accident to Lamar. The chest is now in the strong room. The papers no doubt are in the cabin here somewhere. I can't let those people down. I'm responsible for the safe delivery of the funds and the papers. And damme, young sir, I'll deliver them myself."

"Yes, sir," I said. I hope I was a satisfactory conscience, one sufficiently complaisant.

"If I see the gold safe in London those chaps can hardly refuse to let me try my luck at finding Semmes. Then when I hand him over the papers he can't in decency deny me a bit of fun. I don't doubt there's room among his raggle taggle crew for a gunner or a gunner's mate."

"You mean, sir, you'd sail with Semmes?"

"Just that—I'd sail with Raphael Semmes. Raphael Semmes! Taste that name on your tongue. There's a spice of older, bolder days than ours about it. Drake and Grenville and old Martin Frobisher—and Raphael Semmes—the last of the sea rovers. Soon or late, as

I've said before, he'll come to grips with a Yankee man-o'-war, and it will be a party I'd be loth to miss. So, at St. George's I'll give over my command and be off."

"I say, sir, couldn't I go along?"

"Why, no, young Holt, I don't think so. Here you are in a nice soft berth making more pounds than you'll make shillings for years to come at the bar or whatever line of villainy you are contemplating. Guineas don't grow on trees, young man, so make hay while the sun shines."

"Don't think I'm ungrateful, sir, and that I don't appreciate what you've done for me, but—"

"But you'd rather go poking your nose into a fight that's none of your affair, with a fine chance of having it blown off your foolish young mug. That's it, I take it?"

"That's something like it, sir." I could not help grinning.

"Holt, you're an amazing ass even for one of your years."

"Yes, sir." I was properly humble.

"Yet, if you miss this opportunity of making a perfectly colossal tom fool of yourself, you will probably regret it the rest of your life—if there happens to be any rest."

"I know I should, sir."

Captain Merrihew broke into a smile and I knew the battle was won. "I don't blame you," he said. "So should I, in your place. Well, so be it."

With that we set about the task that lay before us. It is always a melancholy business, poking among the things of a friend or even an acquaintance lately dead. The pipe you saw him smoking only last week, the book he laid face down on the table and never picked up again; a scrap of his handwriting—the merest trifle that was his, evokes a hundred bright pictures of the past, all at once made sombre by the hand of Death.

But to me there was something especially touching about the little household gods of this unhappy man who had lived a slave to conscience, a martyr to an unsparing sense of duty, and died at last a sacrifice to their imperious demands. His compact little library and a half emptied box of those slender brown cheroots of his conjured up his almost bodily presence. The fat and dog-eared Shakespeare jostling the shabby Keats and battered Shelley on the shelf, they had been his own familiar friends and seemed to mourn his going. My eye rested on an *Epictetus* and a *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*. Had their owner, in his hour of need, distilled any comfort from the reflections of these old Latins, I wondered? Had he found life less appalling when viewed through the gray spectacles of the philosopher? Well, it didn't matter now. The man we had buried only that morning was one with the Roman sages. It was hard to realize, though, that he was gone—as completely as the smoke which had risen from that last cheroot I had seen him holding between fingers already growing rigid. More completely. The

smoke still lingered as an almost imperceptible fragrance, he was only a memory.

"Ah, here it is." Captain Merrihew, rummaging in the desk, had unearthed a thick packet, wrapped in heavy brown paper, tied around and about with twine, and sealed with great red blobs of wax. On the wrapper appeared simply the words: "Captain Raphael Semmes." "And here," he passed me several sheets of notepaper—"you had better destroy this." I saw at a glance what it was. A transcript in Mr. Lamar's own hand of the communication which Major Rainey had taken from the Federal spy. I put the sheets in my pocket intending to burn them. Weeks later I found them again. And now after fifty years I have them still. Age has turned the ink to a faded brown of a winter's leaf. The pages bear the stains of salt water. Yet frail and crumpled as they are, these sheets remain the one tangible link between a doddering old man writing in a club window and the youth that once was his.

Chapter XX

WHAT A WOMAN!

"THEY say love softens one's nature, makes one more gentle, more understanding and unselfish. Not always. It can make you hard as steel or granite—as unfeeling and cruel. Especially if you are a woman. I know."

Marcia Tempest—Marcia Quintard—girl or widow, I know not how to call her—was seated on a cotton bale in the stern of the ship. There Captain Merrihew and I had found her, after her vacant chair at noon and again at the evening meal had impelled us to inquire after her health through Girond when he had carried a tray to her cabin.

Her answer had been: "Would Captain Merrihew and Mr. Holt be kind enough to meet her on the after deck?" And here we were. She had thanked us with sweet gravity for our courtesy and desired that we be seated. "I have much to say and you must bear with me. It isn't easy telling. But like poor Marius, I owe you both an explanation. You, Johnny Holt, have been a loyal friend—and chivalrous. And Marius was just such another. And you—Captain Merry"—I fancy it had been "Arthur" this long time in private.

The little catch in her voice as she uttered his name had in it all the sadness of a farewell. She couldn't go on. That way lay tears and incoherence.

But after a moment she had mastered her emotions. "No woman ever had three more gallant gentlemen to serve her and no woman ever so ill requited their service." Again the struggle for composure. Then in a voice wrung dry of feeling by an almost visible effort of her will, she said her woman's creed of love.

"To a woman in love, shame and honor and right and wrong are words—just words without meaning. And yet I think I must not be altogether feminine. I have enough of the man in me to understand how men feel about things. When my father ruined himself to pay his debts to the last penny rather than cheat his creditors by bankruptcy I applauded him in my heart. When poor Marius sacrificed himself, his home, his peace of mind, my happiness and finally his life, to his sense of duty, I understood. When he, the kindest, gentlest and most honorable of men, did cruel, horrible and dishonorable things in the name of duty, I forgave him.

"I, even I, tried to play this man's game of doing the right thing as I thought you would want me to—Arthur. But I am only a woman, after all. I was bewildered, terrified, with no one to advise me. And I was in love. I have tried to tell you what that means to a woman. Just as a man, an honorable man, anyway, will make duty his god, so a woman may make love hers. To the feet of her god she will bring duty,

honor, the hearts of those who love her, her good name, everything—and make of them a burnt offering upon his altar.

"I tried to play the game, Arthur. I tried to be true to the woman you thought me to be, and I tried to be true to you all, my true friends, and I tried to be true to love. But I've only made a horrible mess of it. All I can do now is to tell you what you have every right to know—and then say good-bye."

Captain Merrihew opened his lips to speak.

"No, please." She held up her hand. "Let me finish. When I have done, perhaps you will forgive me out of pity. You won't mind my speaking before Johnny Holt. I want him to hear it too."

Overhead a blue-black night with the low-hanging lover's lanterns of stars that scarcely cleared our mast-heads. All about us a summer sea, and the *Venture's* wake a phosphorescent glory like a meteor's tail. It was a night to hymn love's praises, not sing its dirge.

In the beginning she had spoken quickly as if fearful that her courage might fail before she had had her say. Now her speech became slower, more hesitant. Hers was not the fluent tripping narrative of the sinner who feels that one plenteously confessed is already half absolved. It was rather an anxious groping for words that would reveal her to us as she was; an attempt of a strongly emotional nature, not given to self-analysis, to analyze itself. She was seeking to give us reasons, motives, not excuses.

Let me tell her story. Not as she told it, with a

naked sincerity that made you believe, where pauses were often more informing than many words and a single helpless little gesture was a *de profundis* in itself. Let me give you rather the picture, of which her story was but the sketch.

It was a gay season in the States that last year before the War. Whatever rumblings of earthquake the politicians may have heard or whatever handwriting may have appeared on the wall, Gramercy Square in the City of New York neither heard nor saw. The Prince of Wales, Mr. Dickens, stately parties and balls, Jennie Lind and Mr. Barnum and General Tom Thumb held the fashionable eye and filled the fashionable mind. Couples honeymooned at Niagara and had their first terrifying "words" to the thunder of the Falls. The nabobs and moguls from the South, traveling in state, arrived on schedule for their summering at Saratoga. All was for the best in the safest and best ordered of worlds.

Swimming atop this whirlpool of gaiety that swirls about Gramercy Square and eddies around Saratoga there sparkles and laughs and dances an iridescent bubble. She is the daughter of Tempest of St. George's and has been consigned like a bale of precious goods to that honest merchant's correspondent in New York. Miss is something of a baggage, I fear, and Tempest of St. George's a soft-hearted old tyrant with a dash of the Jealous God before whom Miss must have none other gods. There is a graceless boy in Her Majesty's Own Especial Light Infantry, who, Miss maliciously

hints, might have one chance in a thousand of becoming the son-in-law of Tempest of St. George's.

"Impudent young monkey in a red jacket!" snorts the Jealous God, who scents a graven image in the offering.

"Father!" retorts Miss, who scents unaccustomed opposition to her divine right of doing as she pleases.

"Damme, Miss, I won't have it," roars the Tempest.

The flower neither breaks nor bends before the storm. It is undutifully cool and noncommittal.

"Speak to her, Sarah, you are a woman. Maybe you can understand what's got into the girl. Tell her there's such a thing as filial duty and I won't have it. Damme if I will." And the Tempest roars off to his counting-house to blow all the clerks from their high stools.

Aunt Sarah, poor gentle lady, caught as it were betwixt two Tempests, speaks to her. What do spinster aunts know of love, reasons Miss, forgetting that spinster aunts are not born in spectacles and lace caps. The mild zephyr of Miss Tempest's "speaking" avails as little as the hurricane of Tempest of St. George's. Indeed, Miss throws Aunt Sarah into a state of temporary paralysis by stamping her foot and declaring she won't give Tommy up, damme if she will. Tommy, heretofore privately regarded as a silly boy, instantly assumes a vast importance. He has ceased to be one of many young men in red jackets, he has become a principle, and Miss is ready to die for him.

Why even at this late day can I speak lightly of the

beginnings of a tragic experience in the life of one who meant so much to me? Perhaps I have got to the age when you must take nothing too seriously. Only youth has the resilience to bound easily from depths to heights. Oldsters can't afford to indulge their emotions any more than their palates. Plain fare and a sardonic smile; that's the ticket.

The upshot of the affair is that Miss is packed off to New York to stay there till she comes to her senses, egad. And with her goes Miranda, once her nurse, now her handmaiden and always a paragon of propriety. The New York correspondent of *Tempest* of St. George's receives Miss with a two-fingered handshake and an absent-minded "how do, young lady." His wife, with surprising good nature, considering she has two nestlings of her own to provide with juicy worms in the way of eligible young men, takes the dangerously attractive stranger under her wing.

Somewhere they meet, she and the man who was to be her husband. Can't you see it? The dangerous dear lady, still a child at heart, playing carelessly with the sharp weapon of her own beauty. The grave young man, ten years her senior.

"I think I was attracted to him at first because he was different—and indifferent," she said. "Like Byron without the nasty, conceited, sneering manner that he must have had. I think he was the first man I ever consciously tried to attract. Any woman would know why I did it. He seemed so calm and detached. I wanted to—to upset him—I wanted to *matter*."

"The first evening I met him we were together for a long while and never a single bit of flattery out of him. He talked mostly about ocean currents, I think."

Poor devil, he probably was in her toils then. Lamar (I can't think of him by other than the name I called him) was not the man to court popularity by flattery or even pleasing truths. In his honesty and innate good breeding, no doubt, he considered it both unnecessary and presumptuous to comment on her obvious attractions. Instead he paid her the compliment of talking about the matters nearest his heart rather than indulging in the pointless twaddle of society. In his ignorance of women he had adopted the surest method of piquing her interest. From that time forth events moved as rapidly toward the inevitable climax as though he and she were actors well rehearsed in parts written for them by Fate.

"I knew he liked me," she continued, "but I knew it only by his seeking my company. I couldn't understand him at all. He seemed to have no feelings. He was like your idea of a judge on the bench. I think, deep down, I was a little afraid of him. Most men I had met seemed to be just big overgrown schoolboys beside him."

I think I know what she meant. Most men *do* fling themselves about a bit in the presence of an attractive woman.

"I had no idea he was going to ask me to marry him when he did. And the way he asked me! 'Miss Tempest, I trust you will forgive what must seem the height

of presumption in view of our short acquaintance. But I admire you very much. At the present time I will not venture to employ a stronger term for my feelings toward you. I am going to ask you if I may hope—' He mistook my astonishment for vexation. He went on to say that he could not expect an immediate answer unless it was a negative one. He would ask me to consider his proposal and would return for my decision the next evening if he might."

Poor Lamar. He wasn't a prig nor a cold-blooded fish. He merely had an honest distrust of emotional utterances. In his observation of men, I fancy, he had seen too much counterfeit sentiment pass current as unstudied feeling. To some men it comes natural to divest the most important matter of even its legitimate emotional trappings. He had, too, or I am much mistaken, another defect in his character which would militate against his ever being a shining success as a lover—a very real reverence for women.

"I went home furious with him—and with myself for being furious."

You would hardly expect a girl of nineteen or twenty to appreciate the delicacy of his motives. Poor conscientious fellow, he would have considered it dishonorable to take advantage of his superior age and experience to rush a young girl off her feet. He looked upon her as a beautiful and romantic child, far from the protection of her father's roof and, as such, worthy of the most tender consideration. To the young goddess, sure of herself and the power of her beauty, his

manner was merely an irritating, but at the same time fascinating, puzzle which must be solved.

The progress of that affair is not quite clear to me. I think she began it as a game. It would have wanted an older and wiser head than hers to distinguish the essential difference between Lamar and the young monkey in the red jacket, and a score more like him, whose inflammable but indestructible hearts had been her toys.

A game it may have been in the beginning, but—"I learned to admire him more than any man I had ever known. I was touched by his chivalry and his honesty. When he told me that I was the first woman who had ever really attracted him, I was flattered. How was I to know it wasn't love?" She gave a helpless little gesture. "Even now I think the seeds of love were there—but they died of cold. If only he'd demanded love instead of humbly suing for it." Lamar simply lacked the saving touch of the brute. Love is a primitive business, after all.

It was only the approaching end of his leave that finally prompted him to decisive action. Then, it seems, he forgot all his scruples in his desperation, just as a naturally cautious man, once he resolved on a desperate venture, often throws off all restraint and is more foolhardy than the ordinarily rash fellow.

"He asked me would I marry him now, at once. His enthusiasm, so new and unexpected, carried me away and I consented. Miranda made a frightful scene when I told her. She threw her shawl over her

head and moaned and rocked herself to and fro. She said she could never go back to St. George's for fear father would eat her alive. I told her she could either come and stand up at my wedding and remain with me afterwards or go back alone to St. George's and be eaten alive. I said nothing to my hostess and her daughters. That afternoon I slipped out to meet Marius. We were married, with only Miranda and the church sexton for witnesses. When Marius kissed me after the ceremony I stiffened and it was all I could do to keep from screaming. I realized then that I was tied irrevocably to an utter stranger."

The wedding supper must have been a pretty dreadful affair. The young bride pale and distraught. "I tried to talk and even laugh, but I was continually coming to, to find Marius's eyes fixed on me in wonder. Only then would I know that I had been sitting there staring into space. I was never more frightened in my life. I suppose a girl's wedding night is always rather frightening. She must feel lonely and afraid and cold, just as one feels on the eve of death. She is to undergo a great change, set out in a new, unknown adventure. And she will be alone. Somehow, her husband whom she has known as a gay and charming companion, has become—how shall I say—a thing—like death or fear. But most girls have love to help them. I didn't. I just sat there seeing—pictures."

I can imagine Lamar growing more and more alarmed, as his solicitous inquiries met only with the

answer that nothing was the matter. And finally a chill, nerve-torturing silence, while each sought to avoid the other's eye.

"He had taken a suite at an hotel. It was there I told him the truth. I was ready to go through with it. Surely I owed him that much. I would make him the best wife I could and maybe things would turn out all right in the end. I felt better after I'd made a clean breast of it—calm, almost happy. The relief after the strain of trying to keep up appearances, you know. I think even then if he had laughed away my fears and taken me in his arms all might have been well. As I say I was frightened and lonely and I would gladly have crept into the shelter of his heart and stayed there. But I couldn't creep in of my own accord, I ought to have been swept in. I wonder if you understand at all? I'm not very good at explaining.

"But Marius merely stood looking down at me a long time with all the sadness in the world in his eyes. Then he laid his hand on my head very gently. 'Poor child, it's all my fault,' he said. 'I should have known, I should have known.' I heard him moving about the room. I didn't dare look at him. Just waited hoping he would take me and shake some sense into my foolish little head. At last he spoke in a queer, strangled sort of voice: 'I'm going now. I've left my address here on the table. Remember whatever you decide to do, is right. Write when you are calmer and have had an opportunity of thinking things over. Say 'come' and I come, say 'go' and I go. And don't forget, what-

ever happens, I am your friend and your servant to command. My dearest wish is to serve you and make you happy in whatever way I can.' He took my hand—it must have been like ice—and kissed it. Then he went away. You wouldn't have gone away, Arthur."

Captain Merrihew muttered something in his beard. "No, by the Lord, that I wouldn't," it sounded like.

"I called Miranda and we went home. It was only ten o'clock. When my hostess returned from a party somewhere, Miranda told her I had gone to bed. No one suspected that anything had happened."

It was a subdued and chastened young person that Tempest of St. George's welcomed home. "The girl's got good sense. Knew she had." She was like a person awakened from a nightmare and taking comfort in the reassuring, familiar objects about his room. She was solicitous of the Tempest gout, which was soon to carry the old merchant off, and particularly affectionate with Aunt Sarah. Altogether a graver and more serious young woman.

"A letter came, forwarded from New York. Marius wrote that as he had not heard from me—he understood. He asked my forgiveness again. He was well and wouldn't I write and let him know how I was. He was at my service at any time and in any way. It was a beautiful letter, a real expression of his nobility of character. It ought to have made me love him, but I didn't. I felt sorry for him. I'm afraid I despised him a little for his consideration of me. I wonder if all women are like that or am I hard?"

"We used to write each other at long intervals. Time and distance made me feel that perhaps some day I might learn to care for him—if he still cared. Whether he did or not I couldn't tell. His letters were all about his work and the war—no hint of sentiment after that first one—just friendly. Then he wrote from England that he was sailing as first officer of the *Venture*. I didn't quite understand why an American naval officer should be sailing on a merchant vessel. If I'd known that the *Venture* was a blockade runner, I'd have been still more puzzled.

"You remember, Johnny Holt, I asked you if your first officer was called Quintard. When you said his name was Lamar, I knew that for some reason Marius was hiding his identity. I asked you to inquire of the first officer if he knew Mr. Quintard. That was to let Marius know that I was expecting him. I was really disappointed at not seeing him on the quay. I was beginning to feel that things might be all right between us after all. I was ready to learn to love him. And you remember that night at the Governor's Ball when I sent you to look for my fan? I had heard a whistle like a bird call that Marius had taught me when I first knew him. I realized that he had followed me to the Governor's House and wished to speak with me. You were gone only a few minutes but it gave him time to tell me about the work he was engaged in. 'I wanted you to know,' he told me. 'It's a trifle risky, this spy business. If you don't hear from me in a month you will know there's been—an accident, and

that you're free, dear child.' I was near to loving him at that moment. What I might have said I don't know, but we heard your footsteps on the gravel. He kissed me on the forehead and was gone before I could speak.

"And then, Arthur, you came into my life. I didn't tell you about my marriage because I was afraid you might go away. I won't say that I was tempted beyond my strength. I don't think anybody is, really. I merely wanted your love more than anything else in the world, and I was going to have it—if I could. I determined from the beginning to deceive you by my silence. You might have loved me enough to be willing to share my guilt, but I felt I was strong enough to bear it alone. Why should I tarnish your happiness or destroy it altogether by confessing? Now you know the worst of me—my cruelty toward poor, gentle Marius, my treachery to my marriage vows, my deception of you. I am making no excuses. I won't say my heart is broken. I don't think people's hearts break. I am terribly sorry about Marius's death and other things but I can't even pretend to any regrets. I did what I did, because I am the sort of woman I am.

"But there was one piece of treachery that was beyond me. I couldn't betray Marius to you. It wasn't fear for myself that kept me silent. I knew that even if I did tell you what I knew, his queer man's sense of honor would seal his lips. He would never betray my secret. I knew, too, that he was planning to deliver your ship over to the Yankee fleet, that he was intent

on working your ruin—that you might even lose your life.” She gave a little exasperated laugh that had no mirth in it. “What a perfectly horrible coil of circumstances. I didn’t know what to do. I thought and thought and thought. There seemed to be no way out. Oh, Johnny Holt, you were kind and generous. You will never know how your offer of help strengthened me. I didn’t see what you could do, but it was good to know I had a friend.

“The time came for the *Venture* to sail and still I had done nothing. There was nothing I could do. Then I knew I couldn’t sit eating my heart out in St. George’s, wondering and fearing and not knowing what had happened. I felt I must share your danger, Arthur. I wanted to watch over you even though I knew I could do nothing. And so I smuggled myself aboard the *Venture*.

“I made one last attempt to dissuade Marius from his plan. It was the first night I was aboard. He was passing my cabin and I called him in. I hid nothing from him. Yes, I told my husband that I was going to become another man’s mistress. I went down on my knees to him, but he was firm. ‘You know I love you,’ he said, ‘and that there’s nothing I could refuse that was in my power to give. But what you ask is not mine to grant. There is one thing higher than love and that is duty. It’s not only his own body that every soldier or sailor in war time offers to be broken, if need be, but a woman’s heart as well—perhaps more than one woman’s heart. Yet you have only to tell

Captain Merry what you know of my plans. He will know what steps to take to frustrate them.'

" 'You know I couldn't do that, Marius!' I said.

" 'No, he said, 'no, I don't suppose you could. God help us both.'

"I never spoke with him again until—that horrible thing happened." She bowed her head. For the first time tears shook her admirable control. "I wish I could have loved him. He was a very gallant gentleman."

"Amen," said Captain Merrihew as though he had been in church.

After a moment she had herself in hand and went on speaking in a low even tone as if she were puzzling the matter out in her own mind as she spoke. "I wanted your love more than anything in the world, Arthur, and I thought I was willing to pay any price for it. I was willing to become an adulteress, to live a lie for the rest of my life. But with victory in sight, my courage faltered. You would think after all my cruelty to Marius I could have performed that last act of heartlessness. But when I saw him lying there on the deck something stronger than myself compelled me to acknowledge him as my husband. A few hours more of silence on my part, and my secret would have died with him. But I couldn't. I couldn't turn my back on a dying man."

How curiously alike they were, she and Lamar. He with his "queer man's sense of honor," she with her woman's inexplicable heart. Both driving ahead with

a singleness of purpose, determined to let nothing stand in their way, only to strike at last upon the same rock—their own humanity. He could not put his hand to cold-blooded murder. She could not turn her back upon a dying man.

"And now it's all over. I won't ask you to forgive me for the wrong I have done you. But years from now perhaps—when the hurt has healed—maybe you can think of me a little kindly—as of a woman who would have sinned greatly and gladly for your sake."

Captain Merrihew had risen to his full height and was standing before her. He took her by the arms, not gently, and she raised her face wonderingly to his.

"What a woman," he said, "what a woman!" He laughed softly and possessively as a man might who has suddenly stumbled on a priceless treasure. "I've a mission to perform that may take a month or may take a year. It's to find a man and a ship somewhere on the seven salt seas. When that's done, I'm my own man again, and I'll be coming back to get you."

And she said, "I'll be waiting."

As they seemed to have forgotten me, I went away before they should remember.

Chapter XXI

RAPHAEL SEMMES

SOMEHOW I never doubted for an instant that Captain Merrihew would find his man. From the moment he announced his intention of taking up the mission which had been entrusted to Mr. Lamar, I looked upon it as a foregone conclusion that soon or late we would be shaking hands with Captain Raphael Semmes on the deck of his ship, the *Alabama*.

The world is a sizable place in which to search for a lone ship with no home port and one whose sailing dates and destinations are not to be found by the most careful perusal of the shipping intelligence. Mr. Secretary Mallory had no information concerning the *Alabama's* whereabouts. He ventured the opinion, however, that she was to be found in the Eastern Hemisphere. We might easily have spent months chasing Captain Semmes from one remote corner of the globe to the other—and never have come within a thousand miles of him. Indeed he was famous for an almost uncanny genius for suddenly turning up in the most unexpected places. Still, so great was my confidence in Captain Merrihew's ability to accomplish whatever he might undertake that I would have wag-

ered a neat sum on our finding the *Alabama*. In other words, I would have backed Captain Merrihew against all the admirals and captains of the Federal Navy, which gentlemen were likewise extremely anxious to come within hailing distance of the raider who had eluded them these years past.

And I was not alone in my confidence.

"Of course he will find Captain Semmes. Because—why because he's Arthur," Marcia Tempest had said with a proud laugh. "And it ill becomes you of all people to be doubting him." Not that I was, but womanlike she would not be content unless all the world were joining her in praising her hero.

"Ah, yes. Mon Capitaine will find thees Capitaine Semme'—it goes without to say," was Girond's verdict.

And the night Captain Merrihew and I were to sail for Liverpool Mr. MacAlpin, standing by the bulwarks and gazing out across the dark sea, spoke words of prophecy.

"He will not fail. Some men are born to defeat as the sparks fly upward, and others to find the thing they seek as surely as the compass needle finds the north. Even the last great adversary shall not conquer such as these. For in the manner of their going they gain the victory over Death himself. If a puir mortal body may dare to guess the inscrutable designs of Providence, I say yon Captain Merrihew was born to victory, and to that end was given heart and brain and soul and hand to win where lesser men are doomed to fail. For true it is that we may do nothing of oorsel's,

but only accordin' to the gifts which the Laird o' his maircy endows us wi'. If Bobbie Burns had not been born a poet think ye he'd ever hae been aught but a plough boy?

"And now, lad, I'll be sayin' good-bye. I'll not wish ye luck. Yer fortune's been made for ye long ere you were born. But it'll do no harm to hope 'tis a gude fortune. However, if it be an ill, remember 'tis a man's part to bear it bravely. I hope our paths may cross again, but who can tell? So, God bless ye."

He gripped my hand with a quick hard pressure and turned abruptly away. It was a clear night, but I noticed the moon had of a sudden lost her clear sharp edge and only by dint of blinking my eyes rapidly did I force here to resume it. I envied the unknown Janie in Edinburgh her father. I don't remember my own very well, but if he were such another as that kindly old Scotsman, my loss was loss indeed.

As subsequent events proved, I was right, and so was Marcia Tempest and Girond and Mr. MacAlpin. Captain Merrihew found his man. Had a rendezvous been arranged in advance, things couldn't have fallen out better. The very day we arrived in London the Confederate agents had had word of Captain Semmes. He was at that moment lying snug in the port of Cherbourg, taking a breathing spell after a successful season along the lanes down which the American East Indiamen were wont to go rolling home. But for some months now the game had been wary and had taken to lurking in their coverts, and the *Alabama* her-

self had grown sluggish and unwieldy from the barnacles and sea streamers she had collected during her months at sea. Ship and men were weary of molten suns that sucked the pitch out of the decks and rains that were Niagaras three miles high and fifty miles across, and typhoons that come trumpeting and roaring down like a million wild elephants gone must. Men were sick of eternal gazing at distant horizons for the white tall tops of smart clippers hurrying home to Boston or New York, of the ceaseless lookout for the column of smoke that would be a cruiser come to wreak vengeance on this lone wolf of the seas for a hundred good ships burned to the water's edge. Time enough that men and ship should take a rest.

And now the *Alabama* lay in the snug port of Cherbourg awaiting permission of the Emperor's ministers to go into drydock. Two years of active service had left her with her boilers sadly in need of repair, the copper stripped from her bottom and loose and creaking in every joint. But while Louis Napoleon's ministry at Paris argued as to the degree of hospitality proper for a neutral nation to show toward a belligerent ship, Cherbourg welcomed the rover's crew with open arms.

The French frigate *Couronne* might not dip her ensign or fire a salvo to the stars and bars, for his Majesty's government had not officially recognized the Confederate States of America. But not all the king's horses and all the king's men, and not all messieurs the ministers with all their portfolios, could prevent the

Couronne from giving the *Alabama* the French equivalent of "three rousing cheers and with a will now." Not all the red tape and sealing-wax in the world will ever prevent gallant men from recognizing and applauding gallantry. So the *Couronne* and the *Alabama* exchanged visits and took wine in each other's ward rooms, and Jack of the *Alabama* got sociably and happily drunk with Jean of the *Couronne* among the publicans and sinners of the waterfront.

There was in Cherbourg no lack of civilian admirers, unhampered by the official conscience, who fêted and dined Captain Semmes and his officers, and the trains from Paris brought more—among them ladies, not a few, who would surely die unless they might behold with their own starry eyes this Monsieur le Capitaine Sem', *si terrible et si gentil, mon ami. On dit qu'il est pirate—mais très beau et un homme très galant.* Where a *beau sabreur* is concerned what woman was ever troubled with an official conscience or with an unofficial one, when it comes to that?

Meantime in the River Scheldt, off the good city of Flushing, lies the U.S.S. *Kearsarge*, Captain John A. Winslow. Mynheer smoking his great china pipe before his door in the sleepy sunshine of a Sunday morning in June is startled by the sound of a gun from the river. The tar on shore leave from the *Kearsarge* hastily polishes off his drink or imprints a brief farewell kiss on the red lips of the Wilhelmina of his temporarily undying affections. The gun which startles Mynheer is the signal that the *Kearsarge* is up and

away. Captain Winslow has just received a telegram from the United States minister to France that the long sought *Alabama* has turned up at *Cherbourg*.

All this and more we gather from lengthy letters which the *Times* prints from "our correspondents on the Continent." And Captain Merrihew amid the comforts of our London hotel smelleth the battle afar off, but he does not say, "ha, ha." Rather he damns the dilatory Confederate agents who will be most happy to supply us with suitable introductions to Captain Semmes, but the letters can't possibly be signed until Mr. So-and-so returns from somewhere tomorrow, or at the latest the day after. In the meanwhile, we must be their guests at dinner, at the play and so on. Oh, very hospitable and appreciative they are, but "our correspondents on the Continent" have it on good authority that Captain Semmes proposes to fight the *Kearsarge*—and my companion grows hourly more impatient of delay. But at last Mr. So-and-so is back from somewhere, our letters are signed, and we are off.

I was standing with Captain Merrihew on the deck of the Southampton packet as she approached *Cherbourg*. For some time we had been watching a steamer creeping slowly along outside the breakwater.

"Johnny Holt, can you make out the ensign yonder?" I felt my companion's fingers on my arm with a grip that hurt.

"No, sir, but it's a French ship, I fancy."

"Not it. It's the same breed of Frenchman that we showed our heels to out of Charleston. It's a Yankee

cruiser on patrol. And man, do you see her ports? They're *down*. And behind those ports, there're guns, I'll wager, loaded and ready to be run out. Man Holt, I smell a fight." He fell to pacing the deck and grumbling at the slowness of the packet. "Suppose Semmes is already steaming out to meet her. To come half across the world and to miss the shindy by an hour! No, by gad, that'd be too shabby a trick for fate to play on any man."

But Captain Merrihew's fears proved groundless. When we rounded the breakwater there lay the Confederate raider, as peacefully tethered at her moorings as an old cow in a clover field. Within the hour we were in the presence of the man we sought.

While the commander of the *Alabama* read the letter which Captain Merrihew had presented, from the Confederate representatives in London, I had opportunity to study the last of the sea rovers. His uniform, the regulation naval frock coat, instead of being the universal navy blue was of the Confederate gray which had grown familiar to my eyes in Charleston. The head bent over the letter showed a mass of hair with few traces of white and worn rather long à la *pompadour*. The eyes he raised after the perusal of the letter were keen and piercing, but as to their color I was far from sure. A strong face, with its full aquiline nose, I thought, and a fearless. The moustache with its upward sweep at the ends and the minute island of beard on the otherwise smooth chin were fading into white. A vigorous and energetic fifty years, I judged.

He spoke in a low, resonant voice with a leisurely, almost a lazy deliberation. "Gentlemen, our friends in London speak most highly of the valuable services you have rendered the Confederate cause. I can only add my warmest thanks to the gratitude which they no doubt have already expressed. It goes without saying that any friend of the Confederacy has only to command me. In the meantime"—he indicated the despatches which Captain Merrihew had delivered—"these must wait."

"Since you are kind enough to put it that way, sir," said Captain Merrihew, "I shall come to the point at once. My young friend and I, having been shot at by the Yankees, are anxious to have our innings, and we would consider it an honor to serve in any capacity under Captain Semmes of the *Alabama*. I may say that I have served in Her Majesty's Navy and I can answer for Mr. Holt's zeal and courage, which amply make up for the brevity of his experience at sea."

A smile hovered about the firm lips of Captain Semmes. "Whatever I may suspect of your present connection with Her Majesty's Navy I shall not be so indiscreet as to ask any questions, Captain Merry. Neither shall I consult my manual of international law on the subject of enlistments made in a neutral port. I fear that ignorance of the law must in this case be my excuse. This ship is legally Confederate soil and I will take the responsibility of accepting the service which you gentlemen so generously offer. Fortunately, Captain Merry, there exists a vacancy in our personnel

owing to the absence of our paymaster who has gone in command of a prize. If you will accept the berth—" he paused on the note of inquiry.

"Gladly, sir, though I trust my duties will not be strictly those of a non-combatant.

"Short handed as we are"—again the smile—"and short of funds as we are likewise at times, it is not unusual for our paymaster to command a gun crew. As for Mr. Holt, how would a midshipman's berth suit?"

I could only blush and stammer my gratification.

"Rise and raise your right hands, gentlemen. Do you solemnly swear—" Thus Arthur Merrihew and John Holt swore to support the constitution of the Confederate States of America and became officers in the naval forces of that government. And this brings up a question, which has never before occurred to me. Am I still a midshipman in a navy whose flag has not flown on the high seas these fifty years? As will appear I was never retired from the service nor did I ever resign. Well, John Holt, C.S.N., has a braver ring to it than John Holt, K.C. John Holt, C.S.N., is youth with the salt sea wind blowing through his hair. John Holt, K.C. is age in a fusty wig, with the dust of the law courts tingling in his nostrils.

Bless the nimble fingers of the little quayside tailor and his wife who before evening had made Captain Merrihew and myself resplendent in gray and gold braid. And bless the ancient waiter who pointed out on the carte the reverend wine fitting to christen the

new uniforms. As we strolled back to the harbor through the twilight streets Captain Merrihew's arm was through mine.

Only subconsciously, if at all, was I aware of the little man in the tall silk hat and frock coat, who with his hands clasped behind him was intently watching the *Alabama* where she lay out in the harbor. At the sound of our voices he turned and lifting his hat favored us with a ceremonious bow. "Bon jour, messieurs." It was Girond.

"And what wind blows you here, mon brave?" Captain Merrihew inquired.

"'Tis not the wind, Mon Capitaine. It is the 'eart." He laid his hand upon his breast and bowed again. "When you 'ave lef' the *Venture* and 'ave make adieu to Girond, there no more is reason why I stay. 'Regard, monsieur,' I say to the new capitaine. 'I would be pay and depart. I think no more to behol' you, Mon Capitaine. I say to myself, it is finish. I return to the art of jongleur. But this morning I arrive at Le Havre where all the world talk of this Capitaine Sem' who is at Cherbourg. 'Ah,' I say, 'where is this Capitaine Sem' there also is Mon Capitaine. And—voilà." His intelligent hands became eloquent.

"And what are your plans now?"

"They say that there is to be wan beeg fight. I too will be there."

"You mean to enlist on the *Alabama*?"

"Parfait, Mon Capitaine."

"By Jove, Girond, I had no idea you were such a fire-eater."

The little Frenchman turned his large and melancholy eyes upon the object of his idolatry.

"I myself, Girond, am a man of peace. Un farceur who mak' people to laugh, not to die. But where you go there will go Girond."

"Oh, I say, old chap," Captain Merrihew was genuinely touched. "I can't have that, you know. It's all right my risking my own worthless carcass, but this isn't your row. Keep out of it."

"Think you," said Girond, "that I will be playing like an infant child with leetle red balls to mak' people to laugh when Mon Capitaine go forth to do bataille? I am a jongleur, yes—but before that I am a man, *par dienne*."

From that position nothing could move him. To Captain Merrihew's expostulations he turned a deaf ear and a mournful dark eye. The *Alabama* gained a third recruit that day—and the wardroom a steward of incomparable deftness.

Chapter XXII

REVELRY BY NIGHT

CHERBOURG is agog, and the excitement spreads to Paris. What has been a rumor, scarcely believed, now takes on the hard outlines of a fact.

"Now we know why our Yankee friend out yonder is standing in and out, cleared for action." Captain Merrihew cannot contain his delight. "Splendid! Good old Waxy." "Old Waxy" or "Old Beeswax" was the wardroom's private appellation for Captain Semmes. "Who'd have thought of such a thing happening in this prosaic Nineteenth Century. A proper challenge to battle issued with all due form and ceremony, by gad. Oh, for old papa Ravenel's gift of tongues that I might express myself."

It was just the sort of thing to appeal to Merrihew's Elizabethan ideas of chivalry. And I must say that the old-time way of treating war as a sort of sporting event between gentlemen has much to recommend it. Surprise and deception—the "all's fair in love and war" sort of thing is undoubtedly effective. And the French commander at the Battle of what's-its-name, who called out to his English foe, "Messieurs les Anglais, will you fire first?" was no kind of a strategist, but he must have been a corking old sportsman.

And here was old Waxy doing the same sort of thing. By now all Cherbourg and his wife know the contents of the note which Captain Semmes has written to M. Bonfils, the Confederate agent at Cherbourg:

C.S.S. Alabama—Cherbourg, June 14, 1864.

SIR: I hear that you were informed by the U. S. Consul that the *Kearsarge* was to come to this port solely for the prisoners landed by me, and that she was to depart in twenty-four hours. I desire to say to the U. S. Consul that my intention is to fight the *Kearsarge* as soon as I can make the necessary arrangements. I hope these will not detain me more than until tomorrow evening, or after the morrow morning at furthest. I beg she will not depart before I am ready to go out.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully,

R. SEMMES, *Captain.*

And here it is the 18th—a Saturday. Captain Semmes is behind his schedule but there can be no doubt about his intentions to fight. There is no more thought of going into drydock. Carpenters and shipwrights are working feverishly below decks caulking the widest of the *Alabama's* badly strained seams. Her engine-room crew are sweating and swearing over her poor old burnt-out boilers. If she can be patched up well enough to hobble out beyond the three mile zone of neutrality, that is all old Waxy asks of her. If she is victorious she can return for a proper overhauling. If she is defeated—Davy Jones and the little fishes won't mind if she is a bit unseaworthy.

It is a busy day. Merrihew is on the gun deck with

the other commanders of the gun crews. Gunners are rubbing and polishing and oiling, running the guns in and out to make sure that they will work smoothly on their carriages. The magazine is opened, powder bags of linen, each containing a single charge, and great round footballs of shells are broken out and inspected. On deck a seaman is seated on a coil of rope before a grindstone. Behind him are a pile of cutlasses and boarding pikes. "Give her a twirl, Jem," he remarks to his mate and the whirling stone becomes a Catherine wheel giving off a stream of sparks that show up pale gold in the bright sunlight. He tests the cutlass edge on his thumb and whistles a cheerful tune for all the world like a peaceful harvester making ready for a day in the fields.

On the quarterdeck old Waxy is slowly pacing to and fro, with an eye now aloft and now a-low, but never a word out of him. He is wondering, methinks. A strange medley of kindreds and nations this crew of his. The petty officers are mostly pilots from Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans; the seamen are the far faring sons of half the sea-bordered nations of the earth. There is even a Down East Yankee or two in the lot. Day in and day out Old Waxy's master will has been moulding these diverse materials into a compact fighting machine, but only once have they been tested in actual battle and then it is against a foe, weaker in men and metal than the *Alabama*—the *Hatteras*, sunk off Galveston after thirteen minutes of lively work.

Now according to the gossip of the wardroom, the *Alabama* is to meet an antagonist her equal in every particular. The two vessels differ in displacement by less than ten tons. The *Kearsarge* mounts seven guns, and the *Alabama* eight. The *Kearsarge* carries a crew of some 160 men against the *Alabama's* 150. Both vessels are credited with doing 13 knots, but it is thought that in her present condition the *Alabama* cannot show more than ten.

With so little to choose between the ships, the better commander and the smarter crew should by rights gain the day. At least so the wardroom felt, and they left no doubt in my mind as to which were the better commander and the smarter crew. And yet the silent man pacing the quarterdeck must have had his own thoughts in the matter. In deliberately seeking a fight he was exceeding the spirit, if not the letter of his instructions. The *Kearsarge* was one of many fighting ships of the Union. Her loss would not cripple the Federal navy. The *Alabama* was the best of the scant handful of commerce raiders which formed the backbone of the South's sea power. True, he had an equal chance of winning, but if he lost, it would be a loss his government could ill afford. Perhaps he had been too rash in issuing his challenge to the enemy.

The Northern press had from the beginning vilified him as "corsair" and "pirate" preying on unarmed merchantmen. He longed to disprove this calumny by meeting the enemy gun to gun in open battle. But

was he justified in letting the scurrilous ink-slingers, spitting insults from the safe distance of three thousand miles, goad him into a foolhardy venture?

However the gauntlet was down. There was no turning back. I can imagine his casting a grimly purposeful eye on the motto inscribed on the *Alabama's* steering wheel: *Aide toi et Dieu t'aidera*. So be it. Thus far he had helped himself. For three years he had gone whither he listed up and down the highways and byways of the seas, until his name had become a terror to every merchantman who flew the Stars and Stripes and his capture the dream of every officer from admiral to midshipmite in the navy on whose rolls his own name once was written.

Possibly the reason I ascribe these thoughts to the man quietly pacing the quarterdeck is because they were present in my own mind. I was weighing our chances of victory or defeat with perfect confidence in my own judgment based on my two days' experience as a midshipman. In common with everyone aboard I had a faith unquestioning and absolute in old Waxy. But what about this crew, as heterogeneous as the fruits in a Christmas pudding? Well, Jack is a true citizen of the world with no very strong home ties as a rule, and he has proven time and again his loyalty to the flag of his temporary allegiance. On the whole I felt our chances were good.

Lieutenant Kell, the executive officer, full-bearded and benevolent of eye, and comfortably rounded as to paunch, approached along the deck.

"How goes the coaling, Mr. Holt?" he rumbled. I had been assigned the duty of overseeing the swarthy harbor gang which was bringing the coal overside in baskets from the lighter alongside.

"Just finished, sir," I replied. Indeed the lightermen were already making ready to cast off amid the confusion of tongues which seems a necessary accompaniment to any concerted action on the part of Frenchmen who follow the sea.

"Then we'll give you a more congenial job," said Mr. Kell. "Report to Mr. Merry and learn what you can about gunnery. Maybe the time will come when you will be commanding a gun crew of your own."

Nothing loth I hurried off to the gun deck, pausing on the way to poke my head in at the wardroom door. Dr. Llewellyn, the English assistant surgeon, was seated at the center table with a case of gleaming instruments spread out before him.

"Hi, Holt," he grinned cheerfully, holding aloft a particularly wicked looking knife, "I'm sharpening one up for you." I grinned back but not so cheerfully. Odd, I hadn't really thought of it before. We were actually going into battle. The cheery harvester up on deck with his pile of cutlasses and pikes was preparing against a harvest not of waving corn but human flesh and blood. And the round footballs of shells I had seen coming up from the magazine were to be employed in a very grim game indeed. Along my careless young spine went that curious tingling sensation which our nurses used to assure us was caused by someone

stepping across our graves. War wasn't all brave gray uniforms and gold braid and brass buttons after all, then. There was another side to it as well. I remembered the uncomfortable feeling I had experienced off Charleston Harbor and I sincerely hoped that young John Holt wasn't going to show the white feather.

It is late that evening. Eleven o'clock perhaps. Arm in arm with Merrihew I am strolling through the quiet moonlit streets of Cherbourg. No longer is he the captain separated by immeasurable immensity from the supercargo. We are simply friends, comrades in arms. We are returning from the dinner given to the officers of the *Alabama* by a hospitable Frenchman. Would I could recall his name that I might testify to the excellence of his heart, the skill of his cook and the perfection of his wines. The last health has been drunk and Captain Semmes has promised in our names that we shall be the guests of this same jolly host when we celebrate our victory over the *Kearsarge*. I wonder if any of us had any doubts as to that victory? Certainly at that moment I had none.

"And I shall light a candle for you at early mass tomorrow. *A la bonne chance, monsieur.*" Thus the bright-eyed little lady who was my dinner partner. Bless her sweet soul, I doubt not she kept her promise, and it would have been a churlish and ungallant saint who would have been deaf to a prayer from those lips. Very seriously she gave me the scrap of lace which was her handkerchief that I might wear it as "her cheva-

lier," she said. Lacking a helmet in which to bear her gage I thrust it into my breast pocket. Was she madame or mademoiselle? I declare I don't remember. But I remember the softness of the hand to which I touched my lips in the good French fashion. And its faint perfume, delicate as the breath of a flower—that lingers, too.

And now Merrihew and I are walking back through the deserted streets, with their tall white-faced houses behind whose shuttered windows the honest bourgeois is snoring the snore of an easy mind and a good digestion. The elation of the wine is in my veins and the beauty of her who may have been madame or mademoiselle. I am stirred by the three romantic loves that stir in young men ardent and fond fancies, wine, woman and war. If there is one great moment in each man's life—then that was mine.

"Holt, my lad," the arm within my own gave a friendly pressure. "'There was a sound of revelry by night in Belgium's capital.' Can you fancy that scene—the ball before Waterloo? The fiddles going forty to the dozen and the girls pretty as those we saw to-night. Then the sound of galloping hoofs in the street and a bugle call, and the roll of drums away off in the distance. Chaps running about catching up their swords and cloaks and snatching a good-bye kiss from a young wife or sweetheart—their own or somebody else's. By the Lord, that's the way to go into battle. Not routed out of some muddy camp where you've rotted for days in the rain on half rations, but with

the memory of bright eyes in your heart and a comforting glass of strong punch under your belt."

He laughed softly and I caught the gleam of white teeth through the golden beard. "And here go we, John Holt, straight from the feast to the fight. The gods are good to us. I have it in me to write a poem tonight, only I could never get the confounded thing to rhyme."

He broke off to hum a snatch of song which presently resolved itself into words:

"'Twas broadside to broadside those gallant ships did lay,
Blow high, blow low and so sailed we—
Until the *Prince of Wales* shot the pirate's mast away,
Sailing down along the coast of the High Barbaree."

The same song that had set my blood racing that night when the *Venture* lay at anchor off London bridge and I had sat in silent worship of the man who had done things in the Crimea. And now to think that I could join in that swinging chorus and feel it no presumption on my part.

"Blow high, blow low and so sailed we."

We muted our voices out of respect to the slumbers of the burghers of Cherbourg, but how I longed to expand my lungs and give fitting expression to the triumph which swelled my heart to bursting.

"There is but one thing lacking tonight," he went on after a bit. "She should have been there. How

she would have shone." And would she not? I could see the flame of her ruddy beauty paling to insignificance the less vivid blondes and brunes. I nodded.

"She'd have sent us off with a smile and a kiss. There'd have been a kiss for you, too, you young scoundrel. And we'd have found her waiting to welcome us back with a laugh or a bandage as the case required. A great heart and a brave heart. Show me the man that's worthy of her."

If you weren't, Arthur Merrihew, then she was intended to go matchless and unmated to the end. It was natural that he should think of her at that time and it was just as natural that the thought should sober him for the moment. But not for long. We hadn't gone twenty paces before he was looking up at the sky and smiling.

"Oh, Francie Drake, look down on us tomorrow, and I promise you such a set-to as will pleasure your stout old heart."

Say, old moneybags, glaring at me from yonder corner, did you ever know such an hour in your mis-spent life? Did you ever stroll, arm in arm, comrade-wise, with a veritable flesh-and-blood hero, sprung forth full armed from the pages of old romance? Did your desiccated old breast ever catch from him the infectious courage of the happy warrior, who goes to battle like a bridegroom to his bed, with a song on his lips and the light of high emprise in his eye?

Confound you, take your creaking old bones hence. For the minute I was young John Holt swaggering

through the moon-lit streets of Cherbourg. "Blow high, blow low and so sailed we." Those words were in my ears and there was the pressure of a friendly hand on my arm. What right have you to sit there glaring at me like the damned old memento mori that you are, and reminding me that I'm sitting here in this infernal morgue of a Stragglers' Club, fishing for dreams in an ink bottle?

Eh, sir? Answer me that, sir.

Chapter XXIII

THE BATTLE OFF CHERBOURG

How does a man feel on the morning of his first battle? How does a man feel on the morning of his twenty-first birthday and precisely what color do you see when you think of "red"? In other words, everything depends on the man and the circumstances. I can speak only for young John Holt. I have felt much worse on a morning when, after many days of procrastination, I have screwed up my courage to visit the dentist at long last.

Aside from the uncomfortable moment when Dr. Llewellyn had cheerfully displayed before my unwilling eyes his ugly little knives and saws and nippers, I don't remember any qualms. Not that I claim any credit for bravery. Ignorance is a fair substitute for courage. Besides, how can a man feel creepy on a perfect June morning, with everyone around him as merry as costers on a bank holiday?

Breakfast at seven-thirty and all hands in new uniforms as if they were going ashore. Old Waxy at the head of table, quietly genial, and the rest of us in the order of his rank, down to apple-cheeked little Sinclair, the least of midshipmen save myself. I don't say there

wasn't plenty of suppressed excitement, but it was the jolly kind—like the morning of an important race on the river.

And there was Girond, assisting the regular steward, trying his best not to show Merrihew special attention and succeeding but poorly. It was hard to believe I wasn't back on the *Venture* with nothing more before me than the light duties of a supercargo, and a problem in navigation with poor Lamar. The truth of it was, I couldn't quite realize that before noon the show would in all likelihood be over, one way or another, that some of those pleasant fellows who were breakfasting with us "would be supping with their fathers," that even I—— Somehow, you don't realize things like that when you have no experience to go on.

By nine-thirty the anchor was up and the *Alabama* was steaming slowly out toward the breakwater. From shore there drifted to us the notes of Sunday church bells and the sound of cheering. Most of Cherbourg and not a few visitors from Paris were collected to see us off. I wondered if my fair one of the night before were there, and hoped she was.

Following in our wake was the French iron-clad *Couronne*. Her duty was to see that the three mile limit of neutrality was respected, but I felt sure which way the *Couronne's* sympathies inclined. One other vessel was on the move. Merrihew pointed her out to me. "By Jove, there's a beauty." She was a trim little steam yacht, showing the British colors. "Some sportsman out to see the fun."

The call came, "All hands aft." Officers and men, we trooped to where Captain Semmes stood upon a gun carriage. Beside him Mr. Kell stroked his great beard and ran an appraising eye over us. Old Waxy's speech was short. It took perhaps a minute. I remember he ended with a gesture toward the flag snapping in the breeze. "The name of your ship has become a household word wherever civilization extends. Shall that name be tarnished by defeat? The thing is impossible. Remember you are in the English Channel, the theater of so much of the naval glory of our race, and that the eyes of all Europe are at this moment upon you. The flag that floats over you is that of a young Republic, which bids defiance to her enemies wherever found. Show the world you know how to uphold it. Go to your quarters."

As one man we cheered him and with a will—Southern born and Yankee, Britisher, Dutchman, Swede. Most of them owed no allegiance to that flag other than they assumed by a signature scrawled on the ship's articles or an "Ole Olesen (x) his mark." Yet I doubt if Drake's men or Nelson's did their duty more unflinchingly than these seafaring sons of Ishmael that day. Call them mercenaries, if you will. Is the man who faces death for his bit of prize money, less a man than the physician who claps his ear to your chest for a guinea, or the lawyer who helps you spoil your neighbor and shares the loot?

We were rounding the breakwater now and Captain Semmes mounted the horse-block abreast the mizzen-

mast and trained his glass on the *Kearsarge* lying some six or seven miles away.

Merrihew's command was an eight-inch gun, one of the four which formed the starboard battery. The gun crew had thrown off their blouses and undershirts and were standing by in readiness for orders. My friend, the Cheery Harvester, was fiddling with a primer and whistling softly through his teeth. I was surprised to note Girond there, immaculate, in his white jacket, just as he had come from serving breakfast.

"Off with your shirt, man," directed Merrihew and the little Frenchman obeyed, albeit with a look of surprise. "Splinters or shell fragments carrying bits of clothing into a wound are likely to cause a deal of trouble," Merrihew explained to me in a low voice. "Only an officer is allowed to wear his coat during an engagement and run the risk of gangrene. It's one of his blessed privileges." He smiled.

"Oh," I said, for the first time feeling a bit less pleased with my brave new uniform.

"Cast off the starboard battery," came the order.

"Good enough." Merrihew laughed delightedly. "Lively, men!"

Our half naked crew sprang to life, casting off the lashings of the gun. Down its capacious throat a powder bag was rammed home. A shell followed, and our gun was run forward. "Put your lovely snout through the window, me beauty, and take a look-see at the Yanks." So says the Cheery Harvester fitting his primer in the breech and uncoiling the lanyard.

Merrihew with a foot on the gun carriage swung himself up and peered over the high bulwarks. I followed his example. Still far off but now steaming slowly to meet us was the *Kearsarge*, bow on, her poles bare against the sky.

I looked along the deck. Captain Semmes was standing like a statue on the horse-block, his glass glued to his eye. Beside him Mr. Kell with reflective hand stroking his beard. The starboard gun crews at their posts. I glanced at my watch. It was a quarter after ten. I noticed that the palms of my hands were wet and there was a dry dusty sensation in my throat that set me swallowing rapidly. I knew then that I was keyed up to the highest pitch. I wondered how my companions were taking it. Merrihew had dropped to the deck again and was giving some directions to the Harvester, who answered him with an "aye, aye, sir." The other men were standing about with no discernible emotion on their stolid countenances. How difficult it is to tell what is going on behind a man's face. Girond with folded arms was gazing at nothing. After an endless interval of waiting, I glanced at my watch again. It was eighteen minutes after ten. An inquisitive gull came sailing by and floated an instant immediately overhead to mew querulously at us before betaking himself off. I watched him until he swooped out of sight below the line of the bulwarks.

I suppose any well-brought-up youngster standing in my shoes would have been making his peace with heaven or at least thinking sentimentally on the old

folks at home or regretting the things he had left undone which he ought to have done. I am sorry that I can recall no such edifying sentiments on my own part. Not that I didn't have my regrets. There was that red-headed barmaid, the new one at the George, who had such a damned fascinating way of alternating dimples with blushes. What a precious lot of time I had wasted screwing up my unpractised brass to attempt a conquest there. Too late now. There was that walking tour old Worthington and I were planning for the Black Forest. I even thought regretfully of the book I was reading at the time. A thumping good tale. I'd never know how it ended, maybe. Oh, yes, there were plenty of things to regret. It's something of a shock to a youngster who is always painting vague, splendid pictures of what he is going to do next week or next year, to realize suddenly that there may not be any tomorrow even. For the moment I was like a very old man who realizes poignantly the vanity of taking thought for the morrow. I experienced a sudden sense of rebellion. It wasn't fair that my glorious rosy future should be blotted out. It was all right for old Waxy standing there on his horse-block, maybe, or Mr. Kell calmly caressing his beard. They were old. They'd had their go at life. I looked up at the cloudless sky overhead. I knew that beyond my vision the English Channel was dancing and sparkling under a summer sun. Monstrous that men should be seeking my life on a morning like this.

"Twas broadside to broadside those gallant ships did lay,
Blow high, blow low and so sailed we—"

Merrihew was singing softly to himself. He gave me a dazzling white smile. I colored as though my thoughts had been written on my forehead. A pretty comrade-in-arms for this happy warrior, I had proven to be. Was I just a fireside adventurer, after all? A silly schoolboy strutting before myself in a thousand heroic rôles, yet flinching at the first hint of danger? By Jove, there were better things in life than rosy barmaids. And what a tale I'd have to tell when it was all over. When today had become history, I, John Holt, could say that I was there and saw that history written in letters of flame against the dun background of battle smoke.

Crash! Deck and bulwarks vibrated under the explosion. Our hundred pounder mounted in the bow and its crew were fading out in the fog of smoke that came drifting back. The sharp smell of burned powder tingled in my nostrils and bit into my throat. My head hummed like a bee hive. From the bottom of a deep well Merrihew called faintly, "The ball is opened."

My soul hunched its shoulders awaiting the retaliatory wrath to come pouring down on us from the unseen enemy. But nothing happened. After a long time I let go my pent-up breath. The crew of the bow gun were working feverishly over their monster. Presently she spoke again. I thought I heard a far off boom as though the *Kearsarge* had replied.

Merrihew was standing with his eyes fixed on Mr. Kell. Suddenly the executive officer raised his hand. Merrihew turned and barked some order which I did not catch. The Harvester seized the lanyard. Through the open gun port I caught a glimpse of a ship. She was broadside on and to judge by the smoke mounting from her stack, going full speed ahead, but owing to her distance from us, she seemed to be crawling slowly past. The Harvester's arm twitched. There was a terrific concussion as the entire starboard battery let go. A solid wall of smoke rose above our bulwarks. Choking, reeling and dazed, I was thrust aside by the rush of men springing to the handlines. The gun was run back and a half naked demon began furiously swabbing out the muzzle. Someone nudged me. It was Girond thrusting a powder bag into my hands. Mechanically I passed it to a man next me. An instant afterwards without the volition of my dazed brain, my arms were straining under the weight of a shell. I found that I was one of a line extending to a nearby hatchway through which ammunition was being passed up. There came a whimpering overhead which I recognized as the cry of a shell. An explosion forward somewhere that made the deck reel and set us staggering. Some confused shouting and the sound of someone moaning, near at hand or far off, I could not tell which. I knew no more of either fear or exaltation—or any other feeling. My hands mechanically received powder bags and shells from those marvelously sure fingers of Girond who stood next me. My mind

was as senseless, and as sensitive, as the film in a camera. It was registering impressions, which would not be developed as pictures until hours afterward.

The din, which at first seemed appalling, was now merely annoying to my deadened nerves. At times the smoke from our guns would come rolling along the deck in a thick cloud, setting us to coughing and weeping. At others it hung as a mist that changed ropes and spars and rigging and men into ghostly shapes, and phantoms moving about in some dim half-world shouting unintelligible words.

How many times our gun crew leaned on the hand-lines and ran her muzzle in, how many times they swabbed out her black and gaping throat and fed her powder and shell, how many times the Harvester with a tweak of his lanyard set her roaring, I don't know. It seemed to me that it had been going on for hours. The gun grew hot to the touch and hotter, and still they swabbed and loaded and fired.

Once and again as the smoke lifted I caught a hurried glimpse of our adversary. She was still steaming furiously but seemed to have moved not at all. I learned afterwards that both ships were sailing in a series of great circles with a hard port helm which kept them broadside to each other and slowly progressing westward along the French coast. Then the curtain of smoke would close down and the *Kearsarge* would become again an unseen menace hurling destruction upon us from behind a thunder cloud.

Whether we were getting the better or the worse of

it I didn't know, but once a splintering crash somewhere underfoot told of damage to our hull.

"Good old Waxy," Merrihew shouted in my ear. He was laughing and wiping the perspiration from his brow with a powder-blackened hand. I looked and there on his horse-block, with head and shoulders well above the protection of the bulwarks, stood the last of the sea rovers. With his glass under his arm and his hands clasped behind him he stood like some old Viking war god with the smoke swirling and eddying around and about him.

Mr. Kell came rolling along the deck carrying his paunch with dignity before him. He took Merrihew by the arm. "Our shells are bounding off their sides. Give them solid shot."

Merrihew passed the order along.

"Have you noticed how dull our reports sound? Do you think our powder is defective as well as the shells?"

"I'm afraid so," the executive officer replied. "At our last target practice I jettisoned the worst of the ammunition. But I fear the best of it is none too good. However the range is fairly short and we'll hope for the best. Good luck to you." And with a wave of his hand he rolled away.

Had we but known it, the quality of our ammunition was not responsible for our failure to penetrate the *Kearsarge's* vitals. As a matter of fact the *Alabama* was a wooden ship engaging with an iron-clad. If Captain Semmes had known that the *Kearsarge* was

equipped with chain armour, concealed beneath an outer shell of wood, he would not have sailed out to meet her that day. And many things would not have happened. But, then, did one always know the trumps in the opponent's hand there'd be no such thing as whist or strategy.

I'm afraid I'm making rather a hash of my description. It takes a historian, who wasn't there, really to describe a battle. He is always so calm about it and so sure of his facts, even though for the life of him he can't be sure whether he ordered the cabbage from the greengrocer's this morning as he promised his wife he would. But when you are in the midst of a row you see only what is going on right under your nose and you can't be too sure even of that. To the humble participant a "famous victory" or a crushing defeat sounds and looks and smells and feels a good bit the same. If you are lucky to be alive at the end, of course, you may see which flag is up and which down, and so know whether to cheer or slink off with your tail between your legs.

So far as I knew nothing had happened particularly except that our gun had fired an endless number of shots and my arms were aching in their sockets from handling heavy weights. Then all at once Merrihew and the gunners were standing about with their mouths open and all eyes were staring apparently at my feet. I looked down, too, and there was a round object like a football, spinning like a top and hissing like a snake. I felt a cold clammy hand—Death's own—drawn

across my stomach as I recognized the hissing thing for what it was—a shell with a fuse just a second too long. Then a pair of hands gripped the football and it described a graceful parabola over the bulwarks and disappeared. And there was Girond rubbing his palms on his trousers. The infernal thing was hot to the touch, I fancy.

It was all over and no one had said a word. We just went back to work.

I was looking at the Harvester's tensed back as he stood, lanyard in hand, waiting for the word to loose her off. The word never came. Instead the world disappeared in a blinding flash of light which seemed to scorch the breath in my lungs. A giant picked me up bodily and hurled me to the deck. I struggled to my knees and found myself looking down into the upturned face of the Harvester. His eyes were open in a blue, untroubled stare, but the lips would never again shape themselves to a merry whistle. They were gone. And in their place was a jagged hole, black and shapeless. The gun carriage was crushed as though an immense weight had fallen upon it, and the gun was cocked up at a crazy angle. A man without a head was pouring himself out on the deck in a stream as thick as your wrist. Two men lay face down and very still. And one on his knees, who had no face but only a red featureless mask, through which grinned white teeth, gobbled maimed fragments of words and struck out blindly with red hands against invisible tortures.

Where was Merrihew? He was lying on his back with arms extended. His eyes were closed and his face showed ghastly white through the black powder stains. By his side was Girond crouched down on the deck with his lips close to Merrihew's ear. "Courage, Mon Capitaine, it is I, myself, Girond. We go to bring you to Monsieur le Docteur."

Uphill work we made of it. I had him under the arms and Girond supported his knees. The ship was listing badly to starboard and we had to climb the slope of the deck. But heavy as he was, we got him to the wardroom and on the table. Dr. Llewellyn, in his shirtsleeves and with bare arms ruddy as a butcher's, had begun gingerly cutting away at the trouser leg when Merrihew opened his eyes.

"Georgeous fight, Johnny Holt," he muttered thickly. "Go on back. Old Waxy needs all the men he's got." The eyelids fluttered down. The surgeon laid aside his scissors and thrust his hand inside Merrihew's coat. He shook his head. "He's gone."

Girond and I lifted the inert body and carried it over to a corner of the room. The table was for live men—or what was left of them.

I stood a moment looking on the man whom I had known only three months and was to love and revere throughout a long lifetime. Girond crossed the powder-blackened hands upon his breast and Arthur Merrihew lay as if asleep, his chin uptilted a little and ruddy lights playing in the gold of hair and beard. I could

have sworn that there was a smile on his lips. Only the blood-soaked trouser leg, lying shapeless as a half-emptied sack, showed that all was not well with him.

Girond, with folded arms, his sad great eyes fixed on nothing this side of eternity, was speaking words without sound. Perhaps he was commending the soul of Mon Capitaine to the Bon Dieu in whom he, Girond, "believed a leetle bit."

The wounded were coming thicker now. The ward-room was crowded with men lying on the floor, waiting their turn at the table that was becoming slippery with blood. I stumbled on deck carrying in my chest a heart that was like a cold lump of lead, bearing me down with its physical weight.

With dull, dispassionate eyes I surveyed the wreck that once had been the *Alabama*. Aloft swayed broken spars, prevented from falling only by the fouled rigging. In several places the bulwarks had been breached by shells which had ploughed great ragged holes in the deck planking. A seaman was carrying in a shovel, to heave it overside, a mass of offal that but a moment before had been a shipmate. One of the guns of the starboard battery had been lashed down and what was left of their crews had joined the depleted ranks of the gunners, who still worked the two remaining guns. Men had been ordered aloft to shake out the sails. Even I knew what that meant. The *Alabama* was beaten. She was spreading her crippled wings for a despairing flight.

Perhaps you remember how old Xenophon describes

one of his hoplites coming out of battle carrying his bowels in his hands. The thing is possible. I saw it done. A man returning along the jib boom from loosening the jib was hit in the middle by something, a solid shot most likely. I heard him scream and expected to see him topple into the water. But he hung on with one hand, clawing back along the foot rope, while with his other hand he supported his bulging entrails. He reached the deck and staggered a few steps before yielding his tenacious hold on life.

There came a deafening explosion followed by a rending of timbers and a rattle of falling spars on the deck. "That's the end," I said to myself and as I said it I knew I didn't care. For the time being even the instinct of self-preservation had been beaten out of my bruised soul. I think I must have had a moment of insensibility, standing there on my feet.

I was conscious of silence—an utter absence of sound. I wondered vaguely if I had been stricken deaf. No, the guns had ceased firing. Where had floated the colors of the Confederacy, something like a bed sheet hung disconsolate in the still air. The white standard of defeat! Dr. Llewellyn was standing by, superintending the loading of the wounded in the two boats which remained unharmed. The ship was settling by the stern. Through an open hatch I caught the sound of her death-rattle in the gurgle of the water pouring through her wounded sides. Under the impetus of her sails she was slowly widening the distance between her and the enemy. Unguided by the hand

of her masters, even yet she was putting forth her last remaining strength to escape. In her wake floated an ever lengthening line of wreckage—spars, a shattered boat, a floating corpse.

Captain Semmes descended from the horse-block stiffly as though his limbs were cramped from long standing. He spoke a word to Mr. Kell, who nodded. Old Waxy was fumbling with his sword belt and I saw that one of his hands was swathed in a bandage. Then he walked to the ship's side and flung sword and belt into the sea.

Mr. Kell was passing along the deck carrying his paunch with dignity and speaking to the men. More than one of them extended a bronzed and grimy paw for him to shake. Now it was every man for himself, for the ship was going fast. The men were making for the stern, which was low in the water, and dropping over one by one. Sleek bobbing heads began to appear among the wreckage. All at once there returned to me the desire to live. Hurrying aft down the steep slope of the deck I noticed a slight half-naked figure.

"Come on, Girond," I took him by the elbow. "It's *sauve qui peut, maintenant.*"

"No, monsieur." He turned on me the dark eyes from which all light and life seemed to have departed. "I remain with Mon Capitaine."

"Rot," I said, grasping him more firmly and attempting to propel him along. With a movement quicker than the eye could follow he had freed his arm. It was

as though he were an immaterial spirit and had simply faded through my fingers.

"It does not maittaire, monsieur. When it is the end, it is the end. Behol' I cannot swim." Those marvelous, dexterous hands—there was one thing they could not do.

"Never mind," I shouted. Already the cat's paws were beginning to break over the stern. "Stick close to me. I'll—"

The deck slid from under my feet. Instinctively I drew a deep breath. There was the roaring of many waters in my ears, but through it I heard someone calling, "Adieu, monsieur. Bonne chance."

Something had me by the legs and was dragging me through water icy cold. I opened my eyes to a dim yellow light which faded rapidly to utter blackness. I shut my eyes and threw every last ounce of will power into the supreme task of holding my breath. I never knew when I ceased going down and started up. I only knew I couldn't hold my breath any longer. I opened my mouth with a convulsive gasp and instead of choking, deadly water, I took in a great lungful of blessed air.

A hand fumbled at the back of my neck and I was hauled into a boat. For a blissful period I lay with my back against a thwart, gaping like a new-caught salmon. The sun, which sent a grateful warmth through my shivering body, was directly overhead. It was noon, just.

Chapter XXIV

TALL MEN

A TASTELESS pipe gripped in my teeth, I sat slumped low in my chair, staring with eyes turned inward. Beyond my window brooded the green stillness of ancient tree and shaven lawn amid which Balliol has slumbered away half a thousand years. It was Monday the twentieth of June in '64.

Was it less than thirty hours ago that I had breakfasted so lightheartedly with all those jolly fellows in the *Alabama's* wardroom? I wondered how many of them were yet alive. Merrihew was gone and Girond—and Llewellyn, so someone had said. After seeing the last boat-load of wounded off he had plunged into the sea and no one had seen him come up. Well, it was over, as irrevocably over and done with as the Battle of Salamis. Twenty-four hours or twenty-four centuries makes no great difference, once what is has become what was.

The boat which fished me from the wreck-strewn sea off Cherbourg had belonged to the yacht *Deerhound*, the same trim craft Merrihew and I had watched following us out of the harbor. The owner, a Mr. Lancaster, had yielded to the persuasions of his

two young sons who had pleaded to see the duel off the breakwater rather than attend divine service ashore. A good few of us on the *Alabama* owed our lives to these young sportsmen, as it turned out.

From the *Deerhound's* deck I had watched the shores of France fade out. I don't remember that I felt anything other than an apathetic sort of gratitude for being alive. My senses, still numb from the punishment they had received, were capable of nothing more than this reflex action of the instinct of self-preservation. The fact that Merrihew and Girond and many another were lying on the cold sea floor meant little to this primitive ego which the horrors of war had husked down to the kernel. I was not even surprised at my own callousness. My puny little soul merely hugged itself with gloomy exultation that it had saved itself alive.

I was tired, yet too wrought up to rest and was still strolling aimlessly about the deck when the *Deerhound* let go her anchor at Southampton. Here was I home again after my wanderings. Where was the sense of homecoming? It wasn't there. Even my thankfulness for being alive had ebbed. Just the beginning of an ache which with prophetic insight I knew would be worse before it was better.

Captain Semmes, ready to go ashore, stopped to speak with me. He was no longer the trim and indomitable Old Beeswax, but a very old, a very tired old man, a pathetic figure in an ill-fitting black coat borrowed of the *Deerhound's* owner. For a moment he stood considering me out of weary and bloodshot

eyes, his wounded hand thrust into the breast of his coat.

"I'm glad to see you came through all right, Mr. Holt," he said. "So many of my brave fellows didn't. So many, many of them." He shook his head.

"What shall we do now, sir?" I asked.

"I must make my way back to America. But as for you—my advice to you is to go home. You have proved yourself a brave representative of a great people. You, like many another of your countrymen, have shown that you were willing to die for a cause, which, whatever its merits, is not your own. I shall ever remember England and the English gratefully."

"But, sir—" I began.

"Had things turned out differently I would gladly have availed myself further of the service you so generously have given. But as it is—you are an Englishman, a young man with life before you. Why should you involve your fortunes with mine? I fear the end of the Confederacy is not far off and the end will be bitter. Go home, Mr. Holt. It is the advice I should want someone to give a son of mine if he stood in your shoes."

He asked after Merrihew.

"Her Majesty's service has lost a good and gallant officer," he said. "Good-bye, Mr. Holt, and good luck." It was the second time I had been wished good luck that day. We shook hands, he with his uninjured left, and then he descended stiffly and painfully to the boat which awaited him.

I didn't know it then, but the parting of our hands snapped the last link which bound me to that one brief, colorful episode in my life. With the going of that bowed and tragic figure the curtain was down for good. I never ran across any of them again. Not Mr. MacAlpin or young March, not a member of the *Venture's* crew, not a survivor of the *Alabama*. Had they all been creatures of a dream they could not have vanished more utterly from my ken.

But to return to the morning when I sat in the seclusion of my diggings with the oak sported—and alone with my ghosts. No one knew I was back and I was thankful for it. The idea of facing the genial asininities of Worthington made me shudder. The thought of submitting my wounds to the probing of his cheerful, tactless curiosity set my teeth on edge. A disembodied spirit suspended in the half light between two worlds, and part of neither, is in no mood for companionship.

I must endeavor to get my bearings. The life of freedom and far faring was done with forever. Somehow I knew I would never again pick up the thread of it, even in some altered form and under different circumstances. The thought of settling down to the old life of a student was abhorrent to me. Jolly enough it had seemed three months ago, but now the after-taste of it lay stale and insipid on my tongue. I had drunk of strong drink, if only for a little; could I ever go back to the small beer which the general run of mankind seems to relish?

Something had been added to me or taken away. I had rubbed shoulders with men, tall in spirit and beloved of the gods—men who knew how to live and die for an Idea. They were gone. The sea had taken them one by one—Lamar, Merrihew, Girond—those three so alike in their devotion to an Idea, so different in all else. Where and when should I look upon their like again? Not among the self-seekers and opportunists that most men are.

I was young, with my life before me, but I felt old and lonely and bereaved. I could say with Job, "The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away." But I could not say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." That came afterward, when the wounds were only scars, and I realized that I had been blessed with riches far beyond my poor deserving, treasure that neither moth nor rust nor thief nor even the gray sea could filch from me.

Mine had been a happy life, as lives go. But the last fifty years of it have been a little unreal. They would be, alongside the splendid reality of "those days." Oh, I have done my bit of scrambling for pennies in the mire and shoving and shouldering and fawning and lying for place and preferment. But I'm afraid I have been a bit half-hearted in my efforts. I couldn't go about it with the deadly seriousness that most men seem to put into the business of life. I used to think I might get more serious as I grew older. But I haven't. I drank too deep of Reality (or Romance—

I don't know which) at an impressionable age. It has made me frivolous.

When I sat down to write my obituary, I had no idea it would take so long. But I'm glad I did it and I'm equally glad it is finished. While I have been scribbling away, things have happened to stir my sluggish old blood and make me restless and eager to have done.

I began page one of this manuscript, which has now attained such terrifying bulk, in a world vastly different from the world today. Since then things have been happening. The drums of Drake have roared along the Devon coast summoning the shades of old sea rovers to rally to England in her most need. As I have sat scribbling in my club window regiments have marched by along Pall Mall, many regiments. Thomas, the commissionaire, no longer guards the door. He has packed up his blue coat and his medals and gone. He's Sergeant-Major Thomas now and the last I heard of him he was in Flanders. The Stragglers' Club is more of a morgue than ever. All the youngsters are gone. There's no one left but hoary ancients like John Holt, too old and useless to be even a special constable.

I can't keep my mind off those youngsters out there in France having their go at Reality. Some of them I pity. But others I envy from the bottom of my heart. They will be the men tall in spirit and beloved of the gods. They shall know the same hell of mud

and blood and mortal weariness and fear as do their brothers of coarser clay. But they shall also know many things beside. Some shall be the Lamars, warmed by the divine fire of Duty, yet happier than he, because untorn by divided loyalties. To some shall be given the spirit of the happy warrior, who seeks adventure as other men seek gold. And like Merrihew, whether they live or die, they shall be victors. Yet others will carry on with the single-hearted fidelity of little Girond and they too shall have their reward. And some shall be even as I, John Holt, beloved of the gods in their way. They shall not be heroes but the next best thing. They will have walked with tall men, comradeswise.

Postscript .

BY THE
VERY REVEREND ST. THOMAS WORTHINGTON

Not long since I was called upon to perform the melancholy duty of reading the burial service over my oldest and dearest friend, John Holt.

My first intimation of his passing was a brief notice in *The Times*.

April 17, 1917. JOHN SEBASTIAN HOLT, K.C., beloved husband of Gertrude, for forty years member of the Inner Temple, etc., etc.

I had just laid the paper aside when someone rang me up to officiate. It was a few days after the funeral that Gertrude Holt called on me. She brought with her a bulky manuscript, which she had discovered among her late husband's papers.

"Dear Dr. Worthington," she said, "I have read it and I want your advice as to what disposition should be made of it." For a long time she sat with the bundle in her lap as though loth to part with so intimate a reminder of old John.

"It's a sort of story of his life—or part of it, an

episode he never told me of. Something that happened years before we met. I wish I had known. I think I would have understood him better." There were tears in her eyes and a sad little smile on her lips. "He was a good husband, dear John was. No woman ever had a better, I do believe. But there were times when I felt him an utter stranger. I used to wonder if other happily married women knew their husbands as little as I did mine."

"Dear lady," I said, "we are all of us lonely souls. Each of us is standing alone on a mountain top. Our nearest and dearest are standing on their mountain tops, separated from us by deep impassable valleys. We try to communicate with them, but shout as loudly as we may, they catch only a word here and there. They must take much for granted. If they be of understanding hearts they may sense the messages of love and sympathy that we would convey; but they must listen with their hearts, not with their ears." It is a favorite theme of mine and I fear I may have bored her a trifle. "Suppose," I went on, "your parlormaid could convey to you the poetry that's in her heart when she walks out with her soldier lad. Don't you suppose she would sing you a song that would set all the poets in Westminster Abbey turning over in their graves for very envy?"

"And those young men we see in the queues before the recruiting offices, attempting to hide their patriotic fervor under chaffing and horseplay. Suppose they were given the gift of tongues to tell what stirred

within their breasts. Old Homer's self would need to look to his laurels."

"I suppose so," she said, "yet I wish I had known. I should have liked to share the great romantic episode of his life."

"And did you not?" I asked. "Surely yours was a love match if ever there was one."

She smiled and shook her head. "I wasn't speaking of love or at least not that kind. You will understand better what I mean when you have read this. Of course there is a woman in it but I don't think she was my rival. She was just a part of the whole." She handed me the manuscript, yet lingered a while before taking her departure.

"If you should decide that it ought to be published perhaps you would like to edit it. I'm afraid that John has said some rather dreadful things about you as a young man. And there are passages that struck me as being a trifle irreligious."

Dear lady, she need have had no fears.

Lives there a man with soul so dead, even an old priest, who does not pride himself on the fact that once his blood coursed hot in his veins and that he ran to meet life joyously? Friend John, had you painted me twice the sad dog you did, I would have called your name blessed, and altered not the indictment by the undotting of an *i* nor the uncrossing a *t*.

As for irreligion—may not an old priest, who has seen a deal of religion in his time and of many kinds,—use his own judgment in the matter? Surely there are

many roads to God. And whatever exalteth the spirit of man and lifts him even a little above the meanness and pettiness, the time-serving and self-seeking, the opportunism and sordidness of this world—doth not that bring him nearer unto the Father? Those loved ghosts of your youth, Friend John, those tall men of yours—had they nothing to teach you of singleness of heart and high purpose, of loyalty to an ideal and faithfulness even unto death? If I read your lines aright, they had.

As for the woman, I confess you puzzle me there. Why so much of her and then no more? Did you love her or merely worship her? Was there an epilogue to the play, too sacred or too painful to set down for strangers' reading? Or did some quixotic ideal of allegiance to the dead hold a flaming sword between you two? Is she yet alive? She would be very old, a placid grandmother or perhaps still a virgin, smiling with dim wet eyes over old, and no longer unhappy, far off things.

But I would rather think that she has joined those three who loved her loyally and well—or four. For surely little Girond loved and served her, too, if for no other reason than that she loved Mon Capitaine. And if in the Kingdom of Heaven there is neither marriage nor living in marriage, still surely, there are loyalty and friendship and a love infinitely greater and more selfless than earth can know.